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PRIVATE AND OFFICIAL

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AND OFFICIAL

by

NOURAH WATERHOUSE



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A U T H O R ' S N O T E

THE AUTHOR WISHES TO OFFER HER THANKS TO LORD BEAVERBROOK and to Mr Richard Law, M P , for permission to quote from the Bonar Law correspondence, to The Right Hon Malcolm MacDonald, P C , M P , for permission to quote from his father's letters, to Viscount Esher for permission to print a letter from his grandfather, to the Canadian High Commissioner for permission to reproduce the photograph, *In Canada*, 1927, and to the Proprietors of *John Bull* for permission to quote passages from that paper on pp 322-3

Owing to the varied spheres of activity recalled and also, in some measure, to the times in which we live, publication of this book in December 1940, when it was originally written, was unsettled by newly awakened interest

No harm, I think, has come of the delay, for should distortion exist a slow-motion rendering will detect it None has been recognised

The passage of time, however, has brought certain changes the deaths of H M The King of Spain, Lords Willingdon and Stonehaven, Paderewski, and others The collection of African heads referred to on page 124 has been evacuated from the British Empire Club, and now forms part of the National collection of Big Game trophies at Brancepeth Castle, Durham

In obedience to War economy and in order to avoid re-printing, these discrepancies are allowed to stand, since they will not mislead the reader

*Life is a Comedy to those who think, a
Tragedy to those who feel*

HORACE WALPOLE

AUTHOR'S FOREWORD

WHEN I WAS A VERY SMALL CHILD I CONCEIVED AN IMMENSE ADMIRATION for a man of my father's generation because he understood my way of thinking, and because he had a satisfactory reply to every question I used to trot along holding his hand, and thrive upon his encyclopaedic knowledge For me therefore he became, and remained, an oracle

Then came the War — the Great War of 1914 — and I lost touch with him, but in 1928 I wrote telling him of the circumstances related in the opening chapter of this book I never met him again, but from that new beginning a long series of letters developed and continued over a period of years

My own life had run concurrently with that of my husband in an almost uncanny way He was living in Somerset when I was born not many miles away in the same county He was at the War Office when I, though still in my 'teens, started my first job there When I transferred to the Air Ministry towards the latter part of the War, he had already been seconded to that Department He was Private Secretary to the Duke of York and then Principal Private Secretary to the Prime Minister, while I was acting as Private Secretary to the Duchess of York from the time of her engagement until I embarked upon a period of nearly six years as Private Secretary to Mrs Baldwin

In 1921, during his absence with H R H the Duke of York, Ronald had given me access to his papers and had asked me to try to put them in order In the process of doing this I gradually reconstructed his story and so, after I was married, my letters to the friend of my childhood unfolded the past and came to more recent happenings encouraged by the compelling, and even provocative, rejoinders of my friend

At last he returned the whole collection, exhorting me to crystallise it into a consecutive story To do this would be, I thought, to mutilate the early spontaneity and to penetrate further into the mystery of politics, during more recent times, than is compatible with the original intention of the letters So, with very little

A U T H O R ' S F O R E W O R D

emendation, I left them as they were, although weaving them into a straight narrative

This, then, is the explanation of a certain familiarity in presentation, and perhaps of seeming egotism

The unrestrained use of Christian names in mentioning distinguished individuals, many of whom I personally have never addressed with such freedom — but who were thus known to my husband because he held them in high esteem — is a liberty which I have ventured to leave uncorrected in the belief that it reflects a very real compliment

For these irregularities I therefore claim both privilege and indulgence

N W

To

MY GOOD FRIEND

CLAUDIA HAZZLEDINE

P R I V A T E A N D O F F I C I A L

CHAPTER I

RETROSPECTIVE

IT WAS THE SIXTY-FIRST ANNIVERSARY OF THE PRIME MINISTER'S birthday — August 3rd, 1928 — and Mr and Mrs Baldwin were celebrating the event at Aix-les-Bains

For over five years I had been Mrs Baldwin's Private Secretary, an experience full of interest yet fraught with anxiety. The absence abroad of the Prime Minister's wife, moreover, in no way lessened my preoccupations, and on that hot August day I was 'carrying on' as usual. The voluminous correspondence had been dealt with, the telephone had rung ceaselessly all the morning, and in the afternoon I had managed to keep two appointments and to attend a wedding — a wedding about which no one else knew, for a wise man once said, 'If you wish to keep a secret, why part with it?'

The high-light of the morning had occurred at precisely eleven forty-five, when a voice announced itself and asked peremptorily after the manner of an old soldier, 'Would you like to marry me?'

It was Ronald. I had always hoped to marry him some day. He is not expansive on the telephone, nor is he a man to be kept waiting. The occasion therefore demanded clear and rapid thinking.

'Thank you very much,' I replied meekly, for no face-saving formula occurred to me on the instant. I was groping, in fact, for words of more appropriate assent, when he cut me short. 'Parade at 2 p.m. Savoy Chapel, Strand. I have a special licence,' he said, and rang off.

This was clearly a priority message, and, although by no means dressed for the part, I was agreeably conscious of a new pair of suede gloves.

Presently he rang again to say that he had arranged to lunch at the Chantry, No. 10 Savoy Hill, with the Reverend Hugh B Chapman ('Bossy' Chapman), so, if it was any convenience, would I go along and eat the lunch which his excellent Émile had no doubt prepared for him? I had an official appointment at

RETROSPECTIVE

12 15, a second at 3 45, and yet another at 4, so this suited me very well, but it looked like being one of my busy days

I duly arrived at the flat in Shepherd Market, and with a slightly sinking sensation I endeavoured to wash down a tender cutlet with copious draughts of whisky and water Ronald's lunch, presumably Émile must have thought it odd that for some unaccountable reason one of his master's female admirers, while apparently suffering from severe nervous indigestion, should elect to deputise for him

My anxiety increased as the time grew less Could one hope to reach the other end of the Strand in half an hour? But a third telephone message eased the moment of tension, a mistake had been made, and I need not appear until 3 p m Very well But what about my appointment? Reaction set in Time hung heavily, and I ruminated upon the deficiencies of an inappropriate toilet No one could call me a 'Sweet' Bride 'Neat,' perhaps, but definitely not 'sweet' I wore a tailor-made two-piece, a brown felt 'Henry Heath' and the new gloves

After sadly contemplating these shortcomings in the bathroom mirror, I was again suddenly seized with panic I should be late! So rushing out I boarded the first bus, which fortunately went in the required direction It simply flew along and I knew then that I should arrive too soon and look foolish in the Vestry where I had been told to report After Charing Cross a long traffic-block developed into a complete hold-up Now, indeed, I should never be there in time, and there would be no wedding, for Ronald was a Fatalist!

Unable to bear this fresh anxiety, I hailed a taxi from the tail of the bus, and so, at last, crawling out of the Strand, made the Embankment, and arrived — much too early

The trees which surround the Savoy Chapel were black with starlings in full song, and the necessity of reaching cover seemed really urgent The short distance to the entrance involved a journey like the crossing of Guillemot Island, but this inconvenient experience is, I believe, also considered lucky So my marriage to a chorus of starlings was more satisfactory and romantic to me than it would have been to an accompaniment of 'The Voice that breathed o'er Eden'

As the Vestry door was not to be seen, I nervously approached

R E T R O S P E C T I V E

the main entrance, only to find two American ladies being unceremoniously hustled out by a masterful old man with a beard who said the Church was about to be closed. This seemed catastrophic. Was I, or was I not invited to attend a wedding at this church? Had I come to the wrong one? Was it too late? My heart sank, for by now I was convinced that Ronald was my soul mate, and no one else would do.

My old man, who proved to be the Verger, then tried to hustle me out too.

'But I want to be married,' said I, feeling utterly deserted. He hesitated, looked at me quizzically, and with undisguised suspicion enquired, 'Are *you* the Bride then?' Without waiting for an answer, he manœuvred me out of the door, locked it, and surreptitiously conducted me to a semi-underground passage which appeared to end in a stokehole, but which actually landed us in the Vestry. There, to my immense relief, I found Ronald with the figure of 'Bossy' Chapman struggling into vestments, while reciting strangely inappropriate East End stories.

A more modest wedding could scarcely have been contrived. The congregation consisted of my friend the Verger, and an elderly woman who combined the roles of Registrar, Housekeeper, and general factotum to 'Bossy'. They were stationed one on either side of the aisle, and wholeheartedly made the responses when it was meet so to do.

When Mr Chapman had united us according to the protocol — in a remarkably short space of time, I thought — he addressed the Almighty, for he was evidently on the most favoured terms with Him.

'Now, God, I want to tell you all about these two darlings down here,' he said, almost as though, by some hyperphysical process, he had precipitated himself into God's supreme sanctum. And as we both knelt at his feet, he proceeded to put God wise, after the manner of a perfect Staff Officer, on the most detailed circumstances surrounding this unconventional marriage, which, he concluded, was in his opinion, 'eminently suitable'.

After this we retired to the Vestry and signed the Register. The witnesses were Lillian Cowell and Charles Parker, the congregation. Ronald retrieved the ring, which he replaced upon his own little finger, whence, with difficulty, it had been removed on

RETROSPECTIVE

demand — he having omitted to buy one It was his mother's wedding ring dated 14th September 1876, of a surprising and satisfactorily fashionable slimness I recovered it later My Bridegroom then left with the Registrar, but I stayed a moment with Mr Chapman while he disrobed and picked up the broken thread of his East End anecdote

I kept my two appointments and joined Ronald for dinner in his rooms, a great improvement upon the lunch We were enormously pleased with ourselves and dwelt with satisfaction upon the extreme ease and privacy with which one *can* get married if only the matter is approached with determination After dinner we went to the Victoria Palace, which was still a music-hall, travelling there and back on the top of a bus, my father-in-law having been born a Quaker

The next day Ronald embarked with three friends at Southampton for a yachting cruise round the English coast, and I went to stay with my mother in Yorkshire

On the 26th of August I received the following telegram

'Rejecting Ireland sailed for Guernsey but wind being adverse at nine o'clock shaped course for Portland fresh southerly winds passed Needles four fifteen distance eighty knots started level with and defeated Somersetshire¹ have mortgaged Yacht to send this telegram '

It would have been more economical, and quite as understandable to me if he had just said, 'I am coming home to my wife '

¹ S S *Somersetshire* a troopship left Dartmouth level with *Mariquita* a one-hundred ton cutter This telegram recorded a remarkably fast sail home

CHAPTER 2

1878-1880

THE PEDIGREE OF THE WATERHOUSE LINE IS CHRONICLED IN BOOKS of reference¹ and emerges from 'one of the most ancient houses in the province of Normandy'² at a period when Gauthier, Seigneur de Moulynes, was Governor of the Castle of Falaise where William the Conqueror was born. The family received considerable possessions in England as a mark of favour after the Battle of Hastings, so its association with Halifax and Yorkshire dates from the eleventh century. But the name Waterhouse derives from one Guiscard or Richard who, being a younger son, went forth to seek his fortune in Apulia, and assumed the name of Leumesin after the town so called (Limosin). He rendered distinguished service in the defeat and capture of Robert de Belcome, Earl of Montgomery, for which Henry I bestowed upon him Gertrude, the heiress of James de Longvile, together with large forfeited estates (1112). He anglicised his name which, towards the end of the thirteenth century, was permanently adopted by Roger de Waterhouse, Governor of Nottingham Castle.

A later Waterhouse, John, was auditor to Henry VIII, and his son, Sir Edward, was Chancellor of the Exchequer of the Green Wax of Ireland under Elizabeth. From a contemporary portrait, his three daughters Katherin, Jeanne and Mary look down upon me as I write, and from the pen of his son a note exists which indicates that apparently the family had long since become intimately concerned with the growth and development of Halifax. 'John Waterhouse, who dyed at Candlemas 26 years ago' (2nd January 1539), he writes, 'at his death being very neare 100 years of age, I trow three years under. When he was but a child there

¹ Freeman's *Norman Conquest*, vol. III, p. 137. Dugdale's *Monasticon Anglicanum*, vol. I, p. 242; vol. II, p. 869, Ed. 1661. Aubert de la Chancery des Bois *Dictionnaire de la Noblesse*, vol. X, pp. 541 et seq., Ed. 1775. *Grafton's Chronicle*, vol. I, pp. 54, 181, Ed. 1809.

² Ordericus Vitalis, the learned monk of the Abbey of St. Evroult (period 1085-1141).

were but in Halifax in all 13 houses, now (1565) 26 score God be praised for his increase'

Towards the end of the seventeenth century, conditions prevailing in England marked a new phase in the domestic outlook. Four brothers of the family joined the Society of Friends and left the parental roof. They forsook Yorkshire for Lancashire and, following a vogue of the eighteenth century, their descendants turned from landed responsibilities to professional occupations. In true Quaker fashion, they prospered as shipowners, lawyers, chartered accountants, and architects, thus grafting a new branch on to the old stock.

Ronald's father, John Waterhouse, inherited the ship-owning business, but relinquishing his partnership, he travelled, married, and retired from the Society of Friends. For six hundred years there had been a consistent recurrence of the Christian names, Roger and John, ending with Ronald's grandfather and his father.

John Waterhouse appears to have been very attractive, athletic, and good-looking, kind, gentle, just, and completely thorough in all he undertook. He would say to his son that what was worth doing was worth doing well, and this excellent precept has had its effect, for sometimes I am put to shame by the meticulous care and attention to detail which Ronald brings to bear on everything that he does, no matter how trivial.

Ronald's mother, Ellen or 'Lalla' Jackson, came of a line of English diplomats. Her father, Christopher Witter Jackson, died long before Ronald's birth. We have a portrait of this attractive young 'blood painted by Winterhalter, and, with the same quizzical smile at the corner of his mouth, the self-same speaking brown eyes look down upon the grandson whom he never lived to see. He sits with folded arms, and a very cunning Farmer Giles beard, against a brown canvas sail, for he was a born seaman, and took his Master's Ticket with more zest than his Varsity degree. At Oxford he was frowned on by authority for flagrant disregard of regulations in respect of team and tandem driving, but his prevailing passion led him to purchase any fast-looking craft in the market, operate upon her insides and make provision for his library. This completed, he would sail away for months on end, leaving his wife to scan the horizon and hope for the best.

Unfortunately he was finally wrecked off the Welsh coast at

Pwllheli, after crossing the Atlantic in a small ketch, and his life was lost in an unsuccessful attempt to save one of his crew

Many years afterwards my mother-in-law, according to her ubiquitous habit, was doing an excursion round the coast of Wales, and while hobnobbing with an old dame in her cottage, she paused to admire a magnificent sea chest made of cedar wood and heavily bound with brass. This, the old woman said, was washed up, long years ago after a wreck, with the body of a seaman now buried in the little churchyard. She also produced a gold watch and fob taken off his body. While examining this Lalla discovered a seal with her father's coat of arms engraved thereon, and in the church register to this day there is an entry relating to the burial of 'An unknown Mariner'. We now have both the sea chest and the fob watch.

Lalla's mother was French, which may have had something to do with her daughter's passion for travelling abroad. Lalla was proficient in four languages at least, a magnificent horsewoman, and a pianist up to professional standard. She could not tolerate inefficiency, so that her impulsive nature must have been embarrassing to her less gifted friends — I feel thankful, therefore, that we were not of the same period — but she was particularly remarkable because of her likeness to the Empress Elizabeth of Austria, her contemporary in years.

Ronald has his mother's broad brow and a lot of her mental attributes. He was, in fact, too much like her to live comfortably in the same house! But his pungent character is fortunately tempered by the influence of a Quaker father, whom he admired more than most men.

Lalla's mother and lifelong companion, Louisa Jackson, died at Wembury on 21st September 1871, and John Waterhouse, who remained a Quaker until the day of his marriage, was no doubt indirectly concerned with the part she played in the Franco-Prussian War, as an active member of the War Victims Fund — raised in this country by the Society of Friends — for the relief of the peasantry and non-combatant sufferers in France and Germany.

In a long appreciation, running into seventy pages, of their work within the zone of the armies, and endorsed by the French Government on the 16th November 1871, I find the following

'At a time when rival factions persecuted each other with relentless intensity under the pretence of Christianity the Society of Friends came into being under George Fox in 1624 to protect the liberty of conscience. Although devout to the degree of suffering martyrdom themselves in the days of religious fanaticism, they were never a purely religious body, but conducted their own devotions with the greatest simplicity, and without being puritanical they observed the strictest and most spartan discipline "Res non verba" was their precept self-abnegation their code, and the amelioration of distress regardless of religious persuasion whenever persecuted humanity required relief and succour. They hold War in abhorrence, yet they bow to the Government Authority which legalises it, so while they remain non-combatant, they hasten to the scene of disturbance, and are the last to leave the field. They will not fight, but they share suffering, thus during the famine in Ireland of 1846-7, or the Crimea in 1856, or the War in America for the abolition of Slavery in 1865-7, or in Finland in 1868, they were equally, though unheralded, to the fore.'

Lalla was not a Quaker herself, but the influence of the Society of Friends went far beyond its own members, and it is not altogether surprising that her adventurous spirit sent her wholeheartedly into the war zone under this, the only banner which could lead her there.

Because of her familiarity from childhood with both the people and the country of Alsace, she was posted to that area and sent to Metz via Brussels and Strasbourg. On arrival at Brussels she found Samuel James Capper of the same organisation, and already known to her. He was on the point of leaving for Strasbourg with a drove of horses to be used there as food. Incidentally Capper was also *The Times* correspondent, and if gentlemen of the Press were as well equipped with initiative in those days as they are now, the experience ahead of them probably presented opportunities no less profitable for the readers of *The Times* than for the organisation of the Quakers or the hungry folk in Strasbourg, who were living in cellars and feeding on rats. But the weather was appalling and the winter at its height when he and Lalla set out together as cattle-drovers. They had a terrible experience, the principal difficulty being that Capper's beard froze like a board, thus preventing him from moving his head. And their chief job

throughout the journey was apparently to mitigate this constantly recurring awfulness

After many other vicissitudes they arrived intact and were extolled as heroes by the hollow-bellied commissariat authorities at Strasbourg

After the successive French reverses at Sedan and Metz, Lalla would seem to have done her job as well as she did everything else, for at Metz she received the exceedingly handsome gold and emerald Order of Zähringen from the Germans, and a black lace flounce from the Corporation of Metz¹. But had she been a demure young Quakeress instead of a rather advanced *cosmopolite* of her period, who rode to hounds in the first flight and was like the Empress of Austria, she would probably have refused each of these marks of favour. As it is, or was, we have them both.

I never cease wondering how it is that the women of the Victorian period managed to do such amazing things — when one thinks of their corsets, for instance!

Ronald's mother was no exception to the Victorian tradition, and to add to the corsets, she still further loaded the dice against herself by immediately setting out on one of her interminable excursions at the very first sign of pregnancy. Across country she

¹ This flounce was ordered in 1868 by the Duchesse de Mouchy for the Empress Eugenie, but before its completion the Empress had emigrated from France. In 1871 it was therefore acquired by the Corporation of Metz, and presented to Lalla Jackson in recognition of the services already related, but she, recognising its worth, felt disinclined to accept on the one hand so intrinsically valuable a gift, while on the other she was administering funds in relief of the starving war victims. So she declined it as diplomatically as possible. It was then submitted for the acceptance of Queen Victoria, in recognition of the alleviation of distress made possible by British citizens. The Queen, however, appears to have reacted in the same way, for she commanded that it should be realised in favour of the impoverished lace-makers, and the proceeds handed to the 'Central Friends Meeting House, Devonshire House, Bishopsgate Within'. This was accordingly done, the ultimate purchasers turned out to be acting for the Corporation of Metz, who acquired it thus a second time, and forwarded it without further option to Lalla.

The flounce is believed to be the only piece of Point de Bruges, or Duchess Point, which has ever been made in black. It is eleven yards long, fifteen inches deep, and occupied eight women for three years, so damaging their eyesight that they ceased thereafter to be employed as lace-makers.

went, over rivers, up hills and mountains, accompanied always by her patient but faithful husband, and a large assortment of trunks containing clocks, tea-kettles, household linen, silver, immense bars of well-seasoned yellow soap, and plenty of vermin repeller

When she reached the highest peak of the Swiss — or any — Alps she invariably produced an infant, either stillborn, or at the best, very perishable, and it is a tribute to Ronald's constitution and the devotion of his Gigi, that he was the only one to survive. Fortunately he had the unique advantage of being born in a *pension* at Montreux

Gigi was a simple Swiss woman with a large heart, she remained an ever-devoted slave, following the fortunes of her charge from Montreux to Paris, and from Paris to London, with intervals of intensive travel. Her deep violet petticoats, and, as Ronald described them, 'her scarlet flannel other undergarments embellished with Swiss embroidery,' appear to have made a lasting impression on him. Her loyalty never wavered, and for years afterwards, even when at Marlborough, he still received from old Gigi birthday presents of pale blue knitted vests, accompanied by little notes couched in terms appropriate to childish understanding.

After the triumph of his birth, the dreadful journeyings continued with renewed zest, and Lalla, not in the least daunted by the addition of a very small boy to her entourage, proceeded to scale snow-capped mountains, and to review the key positions of Europe.

R recalls a journey on foot with pack mules from Switzerland into Italy by way of the Grand St Bernard. The little party stayed about three nights at the Hospice, and when his father signed the visitors' book he found the signature of his cousin Theodore on the same page, but dated four years previously. Few persons took that road in those days.

It was customary for the small boy and his father to be left on some bitterly cold railway station at 2 a.m. with a heap of luggage, whilst Lalla, the intrepid, proceeded into the town in search of lodgings for the night. And, however unlikely the prospect, she invariably returned triumphant.

Museums, picture galleries, morgues, cathedrals, scenic views, all were grist to her mill, but this crazy kaleidoscopic infancy has

given Ronald such a distaste for what he calls 'sightseeing' that he is now quite unable to recognise any necessity for excursions beyond the nearest amenities, or, as he would probably express it, '*pour aller planter ses choux*'!

Ronald was perhaps a precocious infant, but he remembers thinking it odd that while his mother powdered her lovely face with fuller's earth, his nurse applied the same preparation to his small posterior. This appears to have struck him as illogical.

Another of his earliest recollections goes back to the village street of Montreux, down which he was being carried as an infant in the arms of his Gigi. Montreux was not a fashionable resort in those days, but only a village with a single *pension*, La Pension Visinande, where he was born. They passed a pair of tall faded green gates, from behind which came a confused sound of clattering on cobble-stones, the rattling of chains, and a sinister thud, then silence. The impression lasted, and it was not until long afterwards that Gigi told him how cattle were poleaxed in the village *abattoir* behind those gates.

As he waxed strong at Montreux and grew to stand on his own little legs, his great friend and playmate was a young Russian woman with very fair hair and very laughing blue eyes, Mademoiselle Walewska by name, and granddaughter of the first Napoleon. She was devoted to the little solitary boy and put in a lot of time amusing him, principally with a hip bath and a fleet of paper boats. She became so attached to him, that between the preamble of his life and the close of her own — for she was the early victim of an incurable complaint — she almost appropriated him, and eventually bequeathed to him a very remarkable Diary bound in red morocco, with two small gold locks, and written in the appalling calligraphy of Napoleon himself. This diary dealt exclusively with circumstances relating to his affair with the Countess Walewska,¹ and one particular incident is placed on record by

¹ Napoleon saw the Countess Walewska for the first time on January 1st, 1807 (Her son, the father of Ronald's friend, subsequently became French Ambassador in London). When Napoleon was returning from Moscow in 1812 he made for Walewice, the Countess's home in Warsaw, but found that she had already preceded him to Paris. It was then that the episode related occurred.

It is curious that this particular diary should have come into R.'s possession because his own maternal great-uncle was the subject of the following letter,

the diarist as evidence of the reliability and the discipline which he had inspired in the soldiers of his Old Guard Parenthetically it also seems to show that Napoleon clearly preferred the boldness of a soldier to the bashfulness of a woman

The passage in question recalls the Moscow campaign when he met and stayed with the Walewskas — an elderly husband with a very young wife — but refers to an episode in Paris

Madame Walewska was in Napoleon's room at the Tuileries which opened on to a long gallery where a sentry had been posted Apparently a certain amount of horseplay ensued, developing into a very good imitation of Hunt the Slipper She escaped him and took up a strategic position behind a table, round which the two of them revolved in full cry, at last she had the door behind her, seized the opportunity, slipped out and slammed it By the time Napoleon set foot in the gallery he found himself colliding with the sturdy breast of his sentry!

'Which way did that lady go?' he demanded

written on parchment and addressed by Napoleon to H M King George III at an earlier date, 5th May 1802

AU NOM DU PEUPLE FRANÇAIS
BONAPARTE PREMIER CONSUL
A SA MAJESTÉ BRITANNIQUE

J'ai reçu la lettre par laquelle votre Majesté m'informe qu'elle a jugé à propos de rappeler au près d'elle le Sieur François Jacques Jackson, Ministre Plénipotentiaire auprès de la République Française La conduite sage et prudente qu'il a tenue pendant le course de la mission qu'il vient de remplir ici, lui a mérité la plus entière approbation de ma part, et c'est avec plaisir que je lui en rends le témoignage

Je ne doute pas après son retour auprès de Votre Majesté il ne soit empressé de vous transmettre tout ce que je lui ai laissez connoître de mes sentimens personnels, et de ma disposition bien sincère a concourir sans cesse au maintien de l'union et de la bonne intelligence, si heureusement établie entre les deux Nations, aussi que de vous donner de nouvelles assurances de ceux que je forme pour la prospérité de Votre Majesté

Donne à Paris, au Palais du Gouvernement, le quinze floréal
au dix de la République Française, Cinq Mai Mil huit cent deux
BONAPARTE
le Premier Consul
Par le Secrétaire d'Etat

EUGENE MARET

Le Ministre de Relations Exterieures
Ch M de Talleyrand

'Lady, Sire? I saw no lady'

'Perfectly,' replied Napoleon 'There was no lady'

Among the many places to which Ronald was taken was Schoppenwihr Lalla Jackson naturally had many admirers, the most consistent and faithful of these, apart from, and notwithstanding her subsequent husband, was one Monsieur le Vicomte Paul de Bussière, brother of the Empress Eugenie's friend, Melanie de Pourtalès He was in love with Lalla as a girl, and remained so to the end of his life He owned a vast estate called Schoppenwihr, on the Strasbourg-Basle line, with a railway halt at his front gates From this entrance, built on a circle like that of Holland House, a double carriage drive stretched away for over a mile through the forest, and dipping gently for half its distance, rose again to end at a bridge, for the chateau was built in the centre of a lake

It was at this house that, as Prince of Wales, King Edward VII used to stay, and there are numerous stories about his visits there It was here also that Princess Metternich of Sandor made her somewhat startling remark to him on first being presented 'I know exactly Your Royal Highness is saying to himself that I am perhaps the ugliest woman in France, but I am equally the greatest wit' and she became one of his staunchest friends She was right on both counts seemingly

On arrival at the Schoppenwihr Halt the huge gates standing a little back would be flung wide, and one might be met by any sort of equipage, a Russian droshki perhaps, careering down the mile-long drive with the flying manes and exhilarating bells of four black Orloffs apparently completely out of hand, or a state barouche proceeding with more restful dignity at a fast trot behind six magnificent greys with trappings, outriders and postilions, or even by Monsieur le Vicomte, handling the ribbons himself, on the box-seat of an English Park Coach and team, correct in every detail prescribed by the Four-in-Hand Club

There were stag hunts in these extensive forests, and the hunt servants galloped through the glades dressed in dark red velvet with sleeves heavily embellished by *galons d'or*, and hunting horns encircling their bodies All the ladies and gentlemen galloped too, until they arrived at the distant lodge of some *garde champêtre* where, by the miracle of prevision, a fabulous *déjeuner* always

awaited them Most astonishing for only God knew where the stag had gone

Paul de Bussiere was a bachelor His chateau contained an enormous salon with four concert grand pianos at one end and a large desk at the other upon which stood a double frame containing the portraits side by side of Lalla and the Empress of Austria

He had a brother who presided over the second family estate named Robertsau, in Alsace During the Franco-Prussian War of 1870 this house was completely gutted and fired by the Germans — he was well known to the authorities on both sides, and highly esteemed because of his services to the wounded and non-combatants this piece of vandalism was therefore unaccountable — shortly afterwards he rode over with a small party of personal friends to inspect the ruins, Lalla was with him, and as they were gazing sadly at the desolation, a German officer came trotting up the avenue with his staff He saluted the company and addressed himself to the owner, who promptly turned his back The officer, nothing daunted, explained that he was ordered to convey the deepest apology of the Higher Command it had not been understood to whom the property belonged, etc etc , the valuable contents of the mansion had been removed, and if he might be favoured with an address to which they could be conveyed, everything should be restored forthwith During this somewhat embarrassing speech, Monsieur le Baron kept his back turned to the officer, but at its close, he wheeled his horse suddenly, and with dramatic gesture towards the ruins, said quietly, '*Mon adresse? la voila!*' and without another word or any salutation, he rode off, with his little band of personal friends following at a discreet distance

I have described these surroundings because at a later date this same Paul de Bussiere was to become Ronald's godfather, and because I think they present the atmosphere which R was to absorb during the intervals of his first day school at Strasbourg, '*en casquette et pelerine*' Rue de la Cigogne, transmogrified by the Germans into 'Storchengasse'

When Lalla married another man, Paul de Bussiere did not abandon his early love, and when at the age of fifty-six she was widowed, he renewed his suit Had she married him then he intended making Ronald his heir But she did not, and — he did not

CHAPTER 3

1880-1895

IN SPITE OF NUMEROUS SEASONABLE MIGRATIONS FROM MONTREUX, Ronald's parents eventually decided that a more congenial *pied-a-terre* was indicated, so they moved their impedimenta, including their son, to Paris. Here for several years his nominal home was the house of his godmother, Madame Armand Peugnet, in the Faubourg Latour-Maubourg. Her husband, who held a distinguished position at his Embassy in Madrid, but permitted himself nevertheless to live a normal life in Paris — still drove with postilions wearing tight blue stable-jackets buttoned up the front, white leather breeches, and little shiny top-hats with narrow tricolor ribbons floating from them.

Great state and decorum prevailed in this house, one always retired from the room with an elaborate bow to those remaining, even if unknown, and one kissed a lady's hand with an acquired elegance and deportment.

In the courtyard enclosed by the *porte cochère* stood a carriage always ready for use, and relieved at intervals like the changing of the guard.

Ronald slept in a little powder closet opening out of his godmother's room, and, because this was the first time in his young life that he had ever slept alone Armand Peugnet, with the *savoir faire* of a true diplomatist, coaxed his courage by placing a full-sized rapier beside his diminutive bed, and explained that he would thus be better equipped to protect '*bonne-maman*' (his godmother).

Paris was colourful, picturesque and invigorating, and Paris gave forth its own particular sound of cracking whips, rattling wheels, raised voices and its own peculiar smell of chicory and *patisserie*. Ronald found much diversion there, and was supremely happy. But his knowledge of the world was only beginning. The ubiquitous Lalla carried him off at intervals, during those early days, to destinations as far afield as Constantinople, St Petersburg, and Madrid.

There was no doubt ample food for speculation during those

protracted journeys for Ronald's acquisitive little mind — the wonderful British passports, for instance, all set out in copper plate upon huge parchments, hand-bound in red morocco cases, and apparently supremely powerful, since a British subject producing such a document commanded the immediate and unstinted respect of everyone. The money belt strapped round his father's waist beneath his clothes, containing all his mobilized wealth, and the long round sovereign cases for current use — but the sight of verminous Russian peasants squatting for hours on the ground at some wayside station like merchandise awaiting transport, and endeavouring to extract from each other's filthy beards some lingering flavour of vodka, left him with a weakness of the stomach which half a century has failed to dispel.

During these adventurous wanderings the education of the small traveller continued intermittently, but his academic life was not a happy one and not particularly productive.

In 1884 therefore his father came to London and bought a house in Kensington, still at that time an attractive semi-rural neighbourhood, and he put his son's name down for Eton, Harrow and most of the other public schools!

The small French boy (in everything but registration) was now transferred from his fairy godmother's home to London, and awoke one morning in the early hours to hear cannon apparently being fired in the house. John's butler, one Mr John Ormond, had arrived home somewhat ill balanced and was demanding admission by kicking the front door. To cool this disorder, John collected all the available slops and deliberately poured them upon his butler's head from an upper window. The butler recovered, and retired, but took umbrage and brought an action against his — late — master (for battery and assault perhaps, though the battery was clearly his). The case came before Mr Paget, a magistrate well known at that time, rather eccentric, and very deaf. 'Was the water clean?' he asked — 'No, it was dirty' — 'But was the *water* clean?' he repeated — 'No, Your Worship, it was not' — 'Yes, yes, but what I want to know is, was the water *clean* water?' and he cupped his ear, leaning forward for the shouted reply of the witness 'No, it was dirty water' — 'Well then, why didn't you say so at first?' admonished Mr Paget, and he fined Mr Ormond 40s or a month's imprisonment. Shades of Paris! and stainless rectitude of

the Law which, so far as concerned the disposal of slops, had never been repealed either in Paris or in London¹

Ronald knew no English, so every Sunday he was taken to the French Church off Westbourne Grove where a Lutheran service was conducted by one of his earliest friends in England, Monsieur du Ponte de la Harpe

He was also sent to a kindergarten school kept by the Misses Maundrell, where he learnt to speak English, and was very kindly treated. His great friend there was one Edgar Garstin, who possessed a tricycle horse with rubber tyres, an extravagant novelty of the age, and whose father, a hunting man, and a neighbour of John's, used to hack away from his Kensington house in pink. About this time also Olympia was built, and Ronald was enrolled as a life governor, his certificate to that effect is dated 1884, and countersigned by Imri Karalfi.

Following upon the great transportation from France to England came a period of almost hot-house culture, during which Ronald made great progress in his own way — though not notably scholastic! Letters marked 'Brouillon' by his mother at this time show that the character was developing, but its principal medium of expression was the violin.

Guerini, his master, apparently became a loss to the world of music because he married the daughter of Bishop Wilberforce conditionally on his retiring from the professional rostrum. He had two nephews, Percy and John Pitts, the latter, a violinist, took Ronald daily, while Guerini himself did so weekly. This appeared to be R.'s outstanding gift at the time, he had been kept at it from the age of four, and had already appeared in public at the Conservatoires of Munich and Strasbourg under Stockhausen, President of the former, and Lalla's late music master.

Lalla's social activities included a sort of 'Salon' held on Thursdays at her Kensington house, on these occasions her friends of the musical coterie rallied round her, such stars as Joachim, Paderewski, Albani, Tetrazzini, Janotta, Corney Grain, whose line in the world of art differed somewhat from the others, and of course Guerini, of whom Joachim said to Lalla, 'I never listen to a violin in his hands without learning something.'

In this atmosphere Ronald's musical temperament was matur-

¹ Until the Metropolitan Police Act of 1901

ing and so continued An entry in his father's diary dated 15th June 1891 records the return of Guerini from Italy with a 'Guarnerius violin for Ronald £12 Hundred years old' This was his first full-sized violin, and a beautiful instrument inscribed 'Joseph Guarnerius 1737,' to be followed later by a Stradivarius

From the age of seven onwards he had been at work unremittingly for several hours a day, under the impetus of Lalla and probably to the disadvantage of other branches of study'

Then came a dramatic change In a single night, almost, the tranquil tempo of this child's progress came to an abrupt end His rhapsody faded away, and he was flung 'capriccioso' into the real pot-pourri of life, a Preparatory School on the south coast

This produced a terrible *volte face* for a sensitive temperament Expert bullying appeared to form part of the curriculum of this establishment, and the masters closed their eyes to it with crazy blindedness Ronald, a little boy of slight physique, was compelled every Sunday to carry to Church upon his back a senior boy of great weight for the best part of two miles, and on one occasion he was laid up for a week, able only to lie on his face as the result of being flogged with an ash stick by prefects, he was condemned to eighty strokes

Small naked boys were pelted with square blocks of seasoned school soap hurled at them with all the force of ten lusty dormitory mates and were frequently known to faint as a result The most cherished possession of one young man was a long sail-maker's needle weighted at the end and attached to a length of twine Much fun could be obtained in form by deftly hurling this weapon at a selected victim, and then recovering it by means of the piece of thread The performance was known as 'Harpooning'

The food was life-giving, since the meat 'crawled under its own maggot power,' but this was not exceptional

The Preparatory school of those days apparently provided a satisfactory livelihood for the scholastic tyro Grim memories remain, one example was innocently revealed in Ronald's time by the contemporary monitor of a neighbouring school In this particular case the diet was chiefly vegetarian though the rations included half-cooked caterpillars afloat on cabbage leaves in tepid water The physical conditions, however, were savage

The Headmaster's three sons had the advantage of the free edu-

cation afforded by their father's school, the eldest was an appalling little bully, and woebetide the smaller boy who attracted his notice All three were present at the school feeding times, but subsequently also shared their parent's meals in domestic comfort, all three graded the top of their respective forms, and did wonderfully well at the school examinations Many years afterwards, when Ronald was at Downing Street, one of them called for an appointment He was about to start a preparatory school of his own, would R become a patron, and allow his name to be used as a reference? Ronald — to use a No 10 expression — 'resisted the temptation to indulge his inclinations'

In spite of these distasteful interventions and, on many occasions, physical inconveniences, R's temperament remained unimpaired So with one particular boy at this school — brought up at home with greater regard to the niceties than to the crudities of life — he formed a great friendship

His father was a country doctor with an extensive practice in the Cotswold Hills, and in this hospitable household at Painswick, Ronald spent the Christmas holidays of an extremely hard winter, with his friend Bernard Moore Sampson

They did a great deal of skating, and quickly became proficient at ice hockey, but in addition to this there was another attraction Dr Sampson usually went his rounds on horseback, he was a fair-haired, good-looking man in the middle thirties, and a light weight in extremely excellent physical condition He came down to breakfast every morning in riding kit, to find his jock boots warming before a huge log fire After he had broken his fast, the ceremony of hauling these on was witnessed with reverence by every member of the family, who remained in dutiful attendance until he rode forth on his distant visits

There were also two ponies in the stables belonging to Bernard and his sister Mabs So when the Doctor invited the two boys to accompany him it was of course a red-letter day The three rode out together in deep snow, through byways and bridle-tracks across country until hours had passed, and many miles, it seemed, had been covered They called at several places and were welcomed each time with hot potations and comestibles, but at last they reached an outlying shepherd's home, a really modest two-roomed cottage where the patient was apparently approaching the end of life

Doctor Sampson swung himself out of the saddle, handing the reins to Ronald, he shook himself free of snow, and struck twice gently upon the door which opened into both rooms. Ronald got a clear view of an alcove bed built into the wall, of a motionless figure thereon, and a pot steaming over the fire.

'Ah, doctor dear,' said the old lady (who was not really old!), 'he's not spoken or moved since yesterday morning. I've been waiting on you because I think he's left me.'

'Rather what I feared,' murmured the Doctor, as he prepared to enter the room. At that moment the patient stirred (R sitting on his pony saw and heard all this), opened one eye and in a weak voice declared, 'No, I'm not dead yet!' Whereupon his wife's demeanour changed instantly as she admonished him.

'Be quiet, John,' said she. 'The Doctor should know best!'

CHAPTER 4

1892-1895

IN SPITE OF HIS SUBSEQUENTLY BRILLIANT CAREER, RONALD FAILED to shine in the scholastic world. He had however the compensating advantage at Marlborough of being in 'Old Dick's Room,' and Old Dick understood the mind of a boy as did no other master.

Many are the tales of his wisdom and his great heart. Had I been at Marlborough in the year 1892 my childhood, as well as my young womanhood, would assuredly have been influenced and coloured by the philosophy of Henry Richardson of Marlborough College. I have known complete strangers come up to Ronald, on board ship in the Mediterranean for example, and say, 'Do you remember Old Dick?' and they would fall upon each other, the air vibrating with their reminiscences, and magic words rising like bubbles to burst upon the surface of their talk, strange words like 'Champneys, Swipes, Old Dick, Fosters, Preshute, Old Dick, Bolly, Vincent Head Old Dick, Lulu, Old Dick,' and so on into the night, until leaving them to it, and reflecting in the quiet of my cabin, I thought of a little spire middle-aged man with the figure of Lord Roberts and the neat beard and direct frank blue eyes of Frederick Courtney Selous. Always accompanied by his small crippled curm Lulu, he would drift through my waking and sleeping dreams.

This little man seems to have made a lasting mark in the world, and his influence will go on for generations.

That is my idea of immortality, to be cast as it were like a pebble into the sea of life, and on sinking to the bottom, to know that the eddies set up by your passing will travel outwards in ever-widening circles without apparent end.

On one occasion Ronald was publicly caned for cribbing. After the affair Old Dick met him and expressed regret at the occurrence, adding, 'Were you cribbing?' The victim replied, 'No, Sir,' for he had actually been reading under his desk a quite irrelevant book. Without further comment, Old Dick left him, and shortly afterwards he was summoned by the Head, and in apology was

made in Common Room before all the masters I am not relating this to show what a Little Lord Fauntleroy Ronald was, but rather to illustrate the psychology of Old Dick

One of Ronald's greatest pleasures both as a child and as a man was to feel a good horse under him, or to be given the box-seat behind a team of Cleveland Bays He had inherited his mother's excellent hands, and as quite a little boy he had often driven in London the team of Frederick Herbst Lake, his godfather, a well-known coaching man about Town in his time

On many a Friday afternoon at school he would hang about the Aylesbury Arms in the town, ingratiating himself with the Guard of the Bath coach which changed horses there Eligibility for the four-in-hand or the Coaching clubs required that prospective candidates should have driven a public coach for at least two seasons, and there was consequently no difficulty in finding drivers for the Bath coach — in return of course for a handsome remuneration There never was a more ardent candidate than Ronald, nor one less able to meet the expected financial obligation The charm and tact for which he later became noted was turned on full force, and in a short time a slightly built schoolboy was earnestly driving his team towards Bath from Manton Turning near Preshute

On Friday it was always possible to escape detection if absent from school, provided one appeared at Chapel the next morning, and about ten miles out of Marlborough there was a small inn at which Ronald would reluctantly part from his coach After passing the time of day with the old landlady, he would then seek a lift back to school (a system now called 'lorry-jumping')

Just as he was about to leave the inn one day Old Dick and another master rode up, there was no time to hide, so the motherly old landlady pushed him behind her voluminous skirts Spreading them well before her, she backed against the wall and bade the gentlemen welcome, at the same time working her way round to the open door, through which Ronald was able to make his escape History does not relate if Old Dick knew of his presence there, but I am inclined to think so, for not long afterwards he and one 'Dolly Amphlett, a tall and extremely good-looking boy (later to go to Worcester College, Oxford, and destined to become a parson 'For,' as he said, 'I have failed for the Civil Service, and for the Army, so there is now nothing left but to go into the

Church') made a perilous escape from school at night, and bicycled some twenty miles or more to see the sun rise over the Altar Stone at Stonehenge on Midsummer's Day. And who should they find there but Old Dick!

Nothing daunted, and in order to prove that he was not himself, 'Dolly' Amphlett went straight over, and with no other disguise than a holiday tweed suit replacing the regulation black jacket, and an assumed voice, he made intellectual conversation with him. After this little passage, the two boys pedalled back as fast as possible, and by dint of much effort were able to appear in Chapel at the prescribed hour, innocently smiling and properly dressed.

Twelve years afterwards, when Ronald was first married, he took Violet, his bride, to Marlborough and called on Old Dick, who was delighted to see him, appearing significantly anxious to know if whilst he was in the district he had taken the opportunity of visiting Stonehenge.

Very much more recently, and in an unexpected manner, the regrettable fact was established that while at Marlborough Ronald's mind became obsessed by games, to the exclusion of other forms of learning.

On the 27th February 1930, Sir William Waterlow, the then Lord Mayor of London, gave an Old Marlburian dinner at the Mansion House. The seating arrangements were admirably thought out and men of the same year were grouped together. On either side of Ronald sat Sir Edward Denison Ross, Principal of the School of Oriental Languages, and Air Commodore Bertie C H Drew, A O C the Royal Air Force in Egypt. Opposite him was Sir Malcolm Robertson, ex-British Ambassador from the Argentine, whence he had just returned. The Bishop of London was among the speakers and incidentally made some allusion to rustication, whereat there was unexpected laughter from Sir Malcolm Robertson and Sir Basil Blackett at his side, taken up by others, and directed apparently at Ronald and his companions. The proceedings were temporarily interrupted by the disclosure that they had all three been rusticated. No attempt at dissimulation in disguise the sorry fact that half-way through one summer term, Ronald, the boy of promise, but little else, was sent home in disgrace from Marlborough, accompanied by a shocking

report which turned up in the back of an old *escritoire* only the other day

John was stern and silent He thought his son no longer fit, by mere proficiency at games, to qualify as his next of kin, and he said so Ronald, being one of his greatest admirers, found it difficult to dissent

After some weeks of anxiety, therefore, doubtless shared equally by father and son, Ronald aged nearly seventeen landed in Cape Town very much alone — like a floating kidney in the corpus of the Universe, he says — with a single sovereign in his pocket If he split this into twenty pieces his responsibilities would increase twenty-fold, therefore it must be preserved intact at all costs So that gold piece seemed to him a talisman, a passport, and his last remaining link with respectability

To the novice in those days Cape Town suggested little more than the seaport of Cape Colony Ronald found himself wandering round the docks, not aimlessly, but apparently inspired Venturing further inland and up a side street, he stopped at a small shop displaying the 'Wanted' notice of a vacancy within He entered and got the job then and there

His duties from that moment consisted, according to his employer, a barber, of sweeping up the sawdust on the floor at stated intervals But according to Ronald's interpretation, his job included any mortal thing, and the anticipation of any wish peculiar to his master, with a view to ensuring recognition as a positive, rather than a negative quantity So all went well, he earned his keep and preserved his gold coin

One day a magnificent fellow came in wearing jackspurs that blinded Ronald to all else He watched him, listened to him, and was completely obsessed by him The magnificent fellow was not unaware of this adulteration He owned, he said, a vast cattle farm near Port Shepstone, on the farm was a store, the only supply for every local requirement The store was without a keeper R got the job, and they sailed together from Cape Town to Durban for Port Shepstone

Percy Erskine Driver was a Trooper in the Matabele Mounted Police, he had been through the Zulu War, the '93 Matabele War and every intervening contact with African impis His real name was, I believe, Percy Erskine, and beneath his rough exterior R

says there was a latent spark of refinement, which he systematically but unsuccessfully endeavoured to smother

On arrival at Port Shepstone, a one-eyed handful of primitive dwellings, horses were obtained, and a ten-mile ride across the veld brought them to the promised store. This proved to be a shack of no particular architectural merit, its façade adorned by the usual hitching-posts. The interior was divided by a stud partition, the outer half comprising the business end with sleeping accommodation under a kind of serving counter, while the remaining portion was available for office use and reserves of stock.

This emporium supplied 'dry goods' to everyone within a radius of some twenty miles and business was pretty brisk, especially in tobacco and tea, which at first were difficult to distinguish, for, being tied up in small cotton bags almost identical in appearance, they produced a similar cloud of dust on the descent from shelf to counter.

A brilliant future seemed to be looming upon the horizon when one morning R awoke to find himself depleted not only of his friend Driver, but of the cash-box too, which incidentally contained his cherished sovereign. The situation demanded dexterous treatment. R perceived himself being summarily dealt with, according to the crude methods then customary, on one or other of a dozen different criminal charges. By veiled enquiry it transpired that any proprietary lien which Driver might have upon the store depended upon a very thin claim, and it the best upon a complicated entail which in no way concerned Driver. R therefore appropriated the most compact necessities and, as he puts it, 'dispossessed a really good horse of its owner'. Abandoning all else, he then set out with the hope of reaching the only Matabele Mounted Police Depot known to him, at Pietermaritzburg, a distance of about 100 miles. On arriving there he discovered that Percy Erskine Driver was in fact a Trooper in the force, and that his particular detachment was then at Pitsani, on the Bechuana-land-Transvaal Border, under the Hon. Maurice Gifford.

R's enlistment in the M.M.P. stipulated of course for the Pitsani Detachment. He reached Pitsani in due course, was received with no enthusiasm at all, except by his friend Driver who, it was said, had just returned from furlough, and who so blinded him by his applause, and admiration for what he regarded as the

tenacity of a 'greenhorn,' that R discarded all idea of shooting Driver and, instead, applied himself with assiduity to the new work allotted to him, namely, the cleaning out of latrines

Almost immediately after this (on R's birthday, the 28th December) Dr Jameson came in from Mafeking, 37 miles away, with a detachment of 120 Bechuanaland Border Police under Major Raleigh Gray, to join the main body under Lieut-Colonel Sir John Willoughby, thus bringing the effective fighting strength up to 470 On Sunday the 29th he paraded the whole force, made them an extremely dramatic speech, and read a letter from the British residents in Johannesburg which contained the following passages

'Thousands of unarmed men, women and children of our race will be at the mercy of well-armed Boers While property of enormous value will be in the greatest peril We cannot contemplate the future without the gravest apprehension

The circumstances are so extreme that we cannot but believe that you and the men under you will not fail to come to the rescue ,'

This was received with resounding cheers, and at 5 p m that night they rode out of Pitsani as a relief expeditionary force Ronald and Driver thus found themselves party to what became known subsequently as the Jameson Raid

The distance to Johannesburg was approximately 170 miles, but their progress became lamentably slow, and although the general impression prevailed that a surprise *coup de main* was contemplated, the march seemed to be conducted in a most leisurely fashion On January 1st the column had arrived within about 2 miles of Krugersdorp, and early in the afternoon found itself opposed by a strong Boer force Fighting began at once, and continued late into the night without apparently making any marked impression on either side But next morning it became evident that the Boers had changed their position, and were now in considerable strength at Vlakfontein, some 8 miles nearer Johannesburg

Jameson accordingly made a detour to avoid Krugersdorp, and proceeded towards his objective with minor skirmishes on the way It was during one of these that Ronald's troop, while reconnoitring as an advance screen ahead of the main column, approached a

farmstead and found it occupied. A few desultory shots were fired at them, but no harm resulted. They rode on, expecting the Boers to retire, and came to the usual 'dambo,' a wide shallow water basin, common to all such homesteads. Two or three of them in extended order rode into it, but the bottom was very soft, and the foothold difficult. R hailed the next man and was just about to extricate himself when a bullet grazed his knee, and brought his horse down, pinning him in the mud.

A fellow Trooper dismounted behind him, and endeavoured to pull him out. It was Percy Erskine Driver. The mud was so slimy that he found it more easy to drag Ronald clear than to retain his own foothold. Yet he succeeded in doing both at the imminent risk of his life as it then appeared, and, slinging R across his own horse, they floundered about, struggling back the way they had come, and finally reached firm ground without further mishap. Driver then expressed himself fiercely. He thought the whole business disastrous, and believed they would ill be shot if caught. The only sane plan therefore was to clear out as fast as possible. So, arranging himself and Ronald on the solitary mount, he rode off in a southerly direction, and kept going for hours and hours, it seemed, until eventually a distant homestead well beyond the sound of firing brought his tired horse to a standstill.

Notwithstanding his own anxieties, he stuck to Ronald, and nursed him there with the generous help of the *Mevrouw* in a manner which would have gratified his own mother. The wound was only skin deep, the bone fortunately remaining undamaged, but they did not know this at the time, for the knee-cap was terribly bruised and abominably painful, suggesting a really serious affair.

News reached them in due course that the whole of Jameson's force had surrendered at Rietspruit near Doornkop, on the Thursday morning, so Driver lay *perdu* in his sanctuary, doing everything for Ronald as one might do for an invalid dog.

Eventually they reached Durban, and sailed for England, but the voyage did little to improve either Ronald's condition or his spirits. They were travelling steerage on board the *Spartan*, the smallest remaining intermediate vessel of the Union Line, making her last voyage home, and carrying steerage accommodation of an almost forgotten period.

I have an idea that Percy Driver was primarily concerned with the desirability of getting Ronald back to his own home, although he did not know where it was, nor had he even discovered his real name.

On arrival in London they hired a small attic in Nottingham Place — very small — containing no furniture or floor covering. They were only just solvent, so in order to make both ends meet they slept in their ration blankets by day and went out by night to avoid the cost of feeding, which they were then able to do more economically at cab-shelters. R. was quite lame, and he remembers lying there gazing, still with admiration, at Driver's big jack-spurs as they hung on a nail, cherished and burnished, and providing the only article of artistic merit to cheer him while Driver was away forage-hunting.

After a little Ronald was overwhelmed with an intense desire to visit his own rooms again at home, and secure some of his books and papers. He still possessed the latchkey to his father's house in Kensington, so one morning just before they would normally have retired for the day they trekked all the way for their last meal to a coffee stall on the cab rank in Clarendon Road — where Holland Park Tube Station now stands. There he left Driver and limped home. He arrived outside his father's house at about 5 a.m. and had to hang about until the servants would have unbolted the front door. All went well. R. effected an unobserved entry, reached his rooms, found the desired books, and got away without anyone being any the wiser.

He realised, however, that Driver was exceedingly annoyed with him about this, and without any knowledge of his family history had featured in his mind a satisfactory return of the Prodigal Son, after which he would go back to his self-imposed role of swashbuckler, but with the moral advantage of having qualified in some measure for the Kingdom of Heaven.

A slight coolness crept between them and the result was far-reaching for both. In Ronald's case it altered his whole career, and in Driver's it also produced an unexpected turn. Ronald read his books again, among them a volume in manuscript of his own poems. Everyone writes poems in his early youth, Ronald had written a lot, but Driver came up to his garret and caught him engaged upon another. He begged to be shown it, but R. thought

he would be facetious and hesitated. He read it, however, and re-read it slowly in silence, it had a curious lilt

‘A lonely path and a lost way
A jaded remembrance of things fair,
Like beauty of youth that has grown grey,
Of things that once were’

and so on

Driver became perceptibly changed, and this brought them together again. The estrangement had only lasted a short time, but the fact suddenly dawned upon R that he was in London, and that of course he must go and pay homage to his father. He owed it to Driver, in the circumstances, to produce his father, and his father’s irreproachable demeanour would make amends for his own inadequacy, of which he was painfully conscious by contrast with the competent character of Driver.

Of so strong a personality that he had curbed himself to great gentleness in word and deed, John Waterhouse scorned the idea of losing his self-control. He had received no warning of Ronald’s return to England. When his son walked into the dining-room just after breakfast, and found him with his back to the mantelpiece reading the morning paper, John merely glanced over the top, murmured, ‘Hullo! sit down,’ and continued reading. After a sufficient pause, to dispel any suggestion of surprise, he welcomed R enthusiastically, and then went up to tell Lalla.

Driver came twice to see John Waterhouse, but declined the hospitality of his roof, and shortly afterwards left again for South Africa, while R went north to Shetland, at that time the veritable Ultima Thule.

The reason of his retirement to this remote spot was the fear of being involved, even conversationally, in a matter which by now had assumed first-class political importance, and one also, which according to Driver’s diagnosis, might easily prejudice his future. As to the more technical reasons for this, however, he was completely ignorant.

Ronald has never seen his friend since, and would probably have heard no more of him, but for the fact that before leaving the Nottingham Place attic, Driver had copied out those of his

protégé's verses which perhaps touched some dormant and long-neglected note in him

About thirty years later, Ronald was given *The Autobiography of Kingsley Fairbridge*¹. In a vivid passage Fairbridge relates how he was trying to reach Umtali when alone with natives and utterly exhausted by malaria, the desperate fight to retain self-possession in such circumstances, he explains, can only be understood after an actual experience of similar conditions. Then comes the following:

'Every alternate day for 110 miles the same thing happens
the aching valley fever would grip brain and heart and hand
and send me staggering like a drunken man until we came to water.
The next day I spent as usual groaning and half delirious,
and on the next we fell in with a man who taught me the way of
versification — Percy Erskine Driver, to whom I have never ceased
to be grateful. Driver's own verses were humorous, sometimes
imitations of Robert Burns, and sometimes no higher than the
lyrical type, but he showed me something of rhyme and rhythm,
and when, later, I attempted to put my thoughts into words, I
learned to know and appreciate the poetry of those greater than I.'

This narrative refers to a period five or six years after R.'s parting with Driver, and it is quite typical of him that he gave an erroneous account of his own experience in the Jameson raid. 'At Doorn Kop,' writes Fairbridge, 'he was struck on the head by a fragment of shell, and would have been disposed of by the burial fatigue but for a timely recovery of consciousness.'

Good Samaritan that he was, he could not resist the disguising Pharisee's cloak, but the seed in him of poetic licence perhaps germinated during his brief respite with Ronald in a London attic, and that its future fragrance should have brought some comfort to the 'heroic soul,' as the Rt Hon Col Amery justly calls it in his preface to the book, of Kingsley Fairbridge, is no less satisfactory to Ronald than the fact that in reality¹ Driver came unscathed through that disastrous ride and, of his goodness, directed my husband's going into a less tortuous path.

¹ The fly leaf is inscribed 'R W at Chequers, October 1927, M N' The donor was the Rt Hon Montague Norman, D S O, Governor of the Bank of England

CHAPTER 5

1896

THE FIVE SIGNATORIES OF THE JOHANNESBURG LETTER READ BY Jameson at Pitsani on the 29th of December had been condemned to death at Pretoria, and Dr Jameson, together with his senior officers, had been sent to London for trial by the High Court of England

Ronald discovered these facts immediately after arriving in Shetland, and in addition to this there were reports of unrest among the Matabele — the second Matabele rebellion broke out on the 24th March 1896 — so, concluding quite rightly that no interest whatever could attach to himself in respect of the Jameson Raid, he returned to London at once, and took the first ship sailing to Durban

In due time he made his way to Pietermaritzburg, thence to Kimberley and Mafeking, where he joined the first Bulawayo coach, which also turned out to be the last

There was no road, of course, and they rumbled along at 5 to 6 miles an hour, the long leather thong of the conductor's heavy-handled whip spinning out monotonously over the mule team, and cracking like successive pistol-shots Time stood still as they threaded their way past ant-hummocks, rocks and obstructive vegetation along old ox-wagon tracks as wide, sometimes, as fifty yards

By this coach Ronald was due to reach Bulawayo on the 31st of March, but attaching himself to a Cape cart which overtook them, he arrived two days earlier and immediately rejoined his old troop, now known as Gifford's Horse

On Saturday night, the 4th April, Gifford's column rode out with orders to dislodge an Impi on the Kam River The column consisted of 31 men of 'F' Troop under Captain Dawson, 11 men of Grey's Scouts under Lieutenant F Crewe, 1 Maxim gun, a number of Colonial boys under Captain Bisset, and Captain J W

Lumsden (late of the Scottish Rifles) as Chief of Staff and Second in Command 160 strong in all¹

They halted at sunrise and outspanned at M'kisa's Kraal some 12 miles on their way. Here Gifford learned of a formidable Impi threatening Holm's Farm, about 14 miles to the north of them. So, after reconnoitring the position and grazing the horses, he broke camp at 2 p.m. and, marching first through thick bush and then through heavy sand, reached open country, where the Matabele commenced to attack with considerable determination and threatened the rearguard.

'F' Troop with the Colonial boys were sent back to reinforce. After an hour's fighting the attack subsided, and easier conditions prevailed until the morning.

They were on the march again at 4 a.m., when the Matabele promptly showed up in stronger force, repeatedly flinging themselves upon the advance guard and the main column. Presently they appeared on all sides, so Gifford decided to outspan once more. This caused a lull, affording time to off-saddle and to serve out rations of one biscuit per man. Later the column trekked on again to Fonseca's Farm, harassed all the way by an invisible Impi on the right flank. Here they camped and laagered behind their saddles in the open. To the rear was a ridge of kopjes, on one of which stood the homestead. To the left was thick bush, and on the right a dry river-bed with a stream, containing deep water pools, lying parallel to it and only a few yards away.

The position was a good one from which to resist attack, but the Matabele were increasing in numbers with alarming rapidity, and they presented a more considerable array than was anticipated.

The column had now marched some 30 miles from Bulawayo, but it was known that the Matabele were concentrating there from the Filibusi country towards the Motopo Hills on the south, and from the Insezi district to the Kami River on the north.

It was very doubtful, therefore, whether the line of communication would remain open. The position, though not desperate at the moment, must have appeared threatening, for Maurice Gifford called up Ronald that night, and explaining all these things in

¹ It was Captain Lumsden's Cape cart which had overhauled the Bulawayo coach, and it was from his information that these particulars were noted at the time.

detail, announced his intention of reporting back to Bulawayo at once by despatch-rider

Ronald was an outstandingly good horseman and horsemaster, his hands, his temperament, and his very light weight all combined to make him so. Several years afterwards Gifford confirmed this, adding that his extreme youth had been an additional consideration. I have seen a photograph of these men in Bulawayo at the time, it includes Ronald looking rather like a Boy Scout come adrift from his troop and being cared for by Buffalo Bill and his hardy cow-punchers.

Ronald was sent to snatch what sleep he could. On Easter Monday before daylight he was roused. The two best horses in the column, both in beautiful condition, had been grass whisped, massaged, and groomed by relays all night. One was to be led. He was given a portion of biltong and a flask of brandy for himself, with two chunks of raw buck meat for emergency use on the horses. This was not for consumption, but to rub around the teeth and gums. A diversion was made by a sortie of 'F' Troop, which of course was heavily attacked at once, but it masked Ronald's departure with his led horse. The stars were growing pale as he turned in a north-easterly direction so as to cross the Salisbury Road by the M'Bembezi River, according to his orders. In the dark hour before sunrise it was bitterly cold.

He pushed along at a good pace, but the reflections of a boy in these circumstances were of course dramatic and intensified. I know he thought of Selous, he always has done in times of physical emergency. He recast the exploit of Frederick Russell Burnham who, with Ingram, another north-west American, and Gooding, an Australian, had performed the almost incredible feat in the 1893 Matabele War, of threading through a series of impis, and reaching the Shangani River — very close to where R was riding at that moment — in order to bring reinforcements to Major Alan Wilson.

Mentally reconstructing this drama, Ronald picked up the rhythm of his horse's stride and remembered the 160 men he himself had left behind.

Through fairly open country they swung along, all three of them, when Ronald came out of his reverie to discover that his led horse was going lame. Examination suggested spavin. There was

no choice He inspected his gear, and cast his led horse near the Salisbury Road, after leaving identification marks to convey their own message in case it fell into civilized hands

If the course indicated by Maurice Gifford were to be followed, the situation at this early stage looked serious, for he might have to cover at least a hundred miles on a single horse In addition to which every mile would become increasingly precarious because of Matabele on the move, his direction now being easterly veering to south so he sat down to ride a waiting but an anxious race

Presently the country became broken, the bush thicker, and consequently the visibility poor He made for distant high ground and there halted Hobbling his mare, he threw her and made her roll, and then crawled to a commanding point to reconnoitre the prospect In less than an hour he was off again, making almost due south for the Mulungwani Range He left this range of hills to eastward until he sighted Bulla Balla Mountain Twice more he off-saddled and throwing his mare caused her to roll He made good going along that last stretch by following an old elephant track, used more recently, and beaten into an open trail through the dangerous jungle, by large quantities of game moving south before the devastations of rinderpest At this point he turned south-west, crossing the Umzingwani River, and here his mare faltered, showing signs of distress Ronald dismounted and nursed her, squeezing his raw meat in water as one does a sponge, he added a few drops of brandy, and thus with massage and manipulation, more dope, more massage, and a lot of encouragement, revived her, so that her spirit came back, and she recovered

After this respite they started off again and struck the Tuli Road SSE of Bulawayo, and about five miles north of Grainger's Store, which had been burned down by Matabele trekking from the Belingwi District to the Motopo Hills, as Gifford had foreseen Presently they came upon Captain van Niekirk with a Mr Pursell, who had ridden about 25 miles up this road on a reconnaissance before returning to Bulawayo Van Niekirk's patrol of some 100 men was at Nicholson's Camp in the Gwanda district The three of them sat down together while van Niekirk wrote a report for which Ronald was thankful to wait in order to doctor his mare again

It was now midday on Tuesday the 7th, and the distance from

this point to Bulawayo was perhaps 40 miles along a good track, but running through very treacherous country. There was no question of changing horses, as the other two had been ridden hard, and still had heavy work ahead, so R reduced his weight by handing over his saddle, rifle and bandolier to van Niekirk, who promised to hide them in the ruins of Grainger's store, so as to retrieve them when he passed with his column.

Then Ronald started off on this last lap with the blanket kept in place by a surcingle, and a pair of stirrup irons strapped together over all, later he also discarded his heavy ration boots.

The road soon became very unpleasant. It was flanked by thick bush and grass three feet high. Presently it passed through high hills on each side, they galloped this pass and came through without mishap, but with some thirty miles still to go Spiro's store was viewed — also burned to the ground — then they galloped a second pass, one in which van Niekirk was heavily ambushed three days later, losing one-third of his men. The rest of the journey was up and down hill most of the way, blind, dangerous and extremely difficult. Ronald was now literally riding a finish, he had a nasty gash on his head from a spent bullet, he was utterly fatigued, but he sang little songs to his mare, imploring her to keep up her courage. With one hand he lifted her head while with the other he stroked and almost magnetized her neck.

At last they reached the outskirts of Bulawayo. R's little mare was moving slowly. They were stopped by a picket of the Bulawayo Field Force. The mare suddenly plunged heavily on to her nose and lay still, with Ronald flung motionless on the ground several feet ahead. It was 4 p.m. on Tuesday, and they had covered, it is said, 138 miles in exactly 36 hours.

R handed over his despatches, that from Maurice Gifford at Shiloh, and the more recent one from van Niekirk, then crawling back to his mare and with her head upon his knees he endeavoured to pour the remaining diluted brandy down her throat. Her glazed eyes fixed themselves on his. And in that position his little colleague died.

That day a relief column under Captain Macfarlane left Bulawayo and was within five miles of Maurice Gifford's laager by noon of the following day. He had taken cover in the dry bed of the river and had drawn his provision and ammunition wagons

into position alongside the gully. With the Maxim gun mounted upon one of these, he was doing deadly work.

On the Monday after Ronald's departure the Matabele had renewed their attack with vigour, although only 200 yards away, and in spite of the havoc wrought by the Maxim, they had rushed the open ground time after time with savage yells and fanatical courage. During one of these mad onslaughts, Maurice Gifford was standing beside his gun directing the fire, when his shoulder was badly shattered. Captain Lumsden took command, only to be mortally wounded himself almost at once, he died on the following Thursday. Then Captain Bissett took over and sent off two native boys in an attempt to reach Bulawayo, but they were not heard of again.

When Macfarlane's column reached them they were nearing the limit of their supplies and the end of the ammunition. There was only one biscuit per head left, and seven tins of bully beef.

The desperate situation was saved, and they were able to break up their laager next morning, arriving in Bulawayo during Wednesday night. Maurice Gifford's arm had to be immediately amputated at the shoulder.

The Bulawayo Field Force was disbanded on July 4th, 1896, when Major-General Sir Frederick Carrington, who assumed command until the end of the rebellion, called a general parade. In the course of a very complimentary speech, he announced the issue of a medal for the show (which Ronald received from the Chartered Company seven years later in India on the occasion of the Coronation of King Edward VII).

Meanwhile the successful outcome of his ride from Shiloh gained him the distinction of being included among the selected representatives of the South African contingent who were to take part in Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee celebrations. He therefore returned to England at once, but it was a sorry homecoming, for his parents were away in Switzerland on one of their customary journeys.

During several days he lived alone in an empty London house with dust-sheets and depression as his only companions, then, unable to bear the situation longer, he set out in pursuit and found his father seriously ill at Montreux, and awaiting removal to England.

On a lovely English summer morning Ronald started from home with his mother and took her to Piccadilly, where she had seats to view the Jubilee procession in Messrs Barrett's shop window, at that time facing down St James's Street, there he left her with instructions to await his return in the evening, when he would take her home. Meanwhile he went to Knightsbridge Barracks, changed, paraded with his allotted troop, and rode in the procession without his mother knowing it. She never did know it, because she had never approved of his 'escapades,' as she called them.

When he found her again that evening, they went home together after a very tiring day for both, and on the way she told him about the show, regretting that he had not been there. She dwelt with much detail upon his own detachment of Chartered Company (Irregular) Horse, which, incidentally, had inspired an enthusiastic ovation all along the route.

On the 28th of October his father died in London, and left a sense of personal loss, felt all the more keenly by R since he had now almost reached the age of 18, and could ill afford to be deprived of this valued companionship and influence.

The trustees of the estate, perhaps not unnaturally, endorsed the views of the family that Ronald's roving career up to date was 'unworthy,' and believing that his education had been rudely interrupted, they decided that it required completion at Oxford. Poor Ronald, feeling a man of the world, and looking a mere boy, found himself with a Greek syntax in his hand instead of his cherished carbine, and controlled by a stern tutor in the place of his heroic chief.

Meanwhile Jameson had been convicted and imprisoned in Holloway Gaol. His health had suffered, however, and he had been released to convalesce in the greater comfort of his chambers in Down Street, Piccadilly.

Maurice Gifford was now also in England, and at his invitation Ronald went with him to see Jameson. There he learned that the trial at Pretoria had been misdirected and prejudiced by the application of Roman Dutch Law, in place of the Transvaal Statutes, that the death sentences on the signatories of the letter addressed to Jameson had been quashed on the payment of a huge indemnity, and they had accordingly been released.

He found himself listening spellbound to these two Olympians as they naturally appeared to him, and to a reasoned dialogue which not only enthralled him at the time, but which materially influenced his own views

Gifford was extremely bitter about Cecil Rhodes, and roundly accused him of duplicity. He insisted that two years previously Cecil Rhodes had delivered to Lobengula, as part payment for concessions in Mashonaland, one thousand Martini-Henry rifles, and 100,000 rounds of ammunition. These arms had been used against the Bulawayo Field Force, but fortunately most of the ammunition had proved ineffective beyond point-blank range, owing to inexperienced storing. Maurice Gifford never forgave this action. He asserted that Rhodes had obtained the sanction of the British Government to establish a Police Headquarters at Pitsani Potlogo (the nearest point on the Transvaal Border), with no other motive than to capture Kruger, hold him prisoner, and bring the Transvaal within the Federated States of South Africa.

Jameson was very reserved, but his reticence only provoked Gifford to greater vituperation, and incidents related at that meeting threw light upon events which R. came later to understand historically.

Much of this conversation of course reached heights of political or Imperial significance completely above his head, but the substance of it left him with no illusions about Rhodes's capacity — in common with certain other great men — to exact the last breath of service from his followers, to appropriate each profitable result, to repudiate every claim to compassion in case of failure, and to refuse even the final nod of recognition to a time-expired servant.

I have seen similar views expressed elsewhere, for instance Millais says (*Life of Selous*) 'Cecil Rhodes was a big man, big in every way except in the matter of gratitude — and when he found that Selous was such an easy mark he exploited him to the limit of his capacity. Rhodes knew that without Selous' immense local knowledge, and tact with the native Mashona chiefs, his best laid schemes might go astray, so he played upon his patriotism and promised him many things, not one of which he ever performed.'

The same thought might be expressed in regard to Francis R. Thompson, who lived with Lobengula for fifteen months in conditions of savagery, more often than not at the risk of his life, in

order that Rhodes might obtain mining concessions which otherwise were in danger of going to the Germans

Very few people have ever heard of Thompson, but R knew him, as he did Selous They are both among the great ones on his 'List of Men'

And Ronald also regards it as significant in this connection that Kipling, a great Imperialist, and an experienced judge of men, should have lived year by year as a neighbour of Rhodes, in the house which he built and called 'Woolsack', that he knew him intimately, frequently met Jameson at Groote Schuur, and yet should have been so persistently reserved about Rhodes while he adopted the character of Jameson as a model for his famous verses 'If'

CHAPTER 6

1897-1899

WHEN TALKING TO DR JAMESON BEFORE LEAVING DOWN STREET, Maurice Gifford had been very complimentary about Ronald, who thereupon seized the opportunity to ventilate his own worries. As a result of this meeting, and the fire kindled by these two stalwarts of Imperial Affairs, the urge to become a professional soldier was born in him.

There were two ways — other than the orthodox procedure — by which this could be achieved, either through the Militia Competitive army examination, or through the equivalent at Oxford.

Ronald had been brought up with the idea exclusively that he would enter the Diplomatic Service, but the events of the past two years, coupled with Lalla's failing health, and the impetus of Maurice Gifford's dynamic personality during the past few months, brought home the fact that he must now fend for himself, and carve out his own future as best he could.

For the moment, however, his immediate prospects were circumscribed by the decision of his father's trustees, and so, fired with renewed zest, he astonished his tutor by an inexplicable application to the Greek Syntax. He went up for his Matriculation at Oxford alone in the middle of the term. 'Moderation' papers were given to him with the comforting assurance that a nominal percentage of marks would procure the desired result, and by the simple process of passing these papers out of the window to a college friend of some experience, Ronald was able to attain the required standard and consequently to satisfy his benevolent examiner! But unfortunately, and much to the consternation of his enthusiastic and misguided accomplice, he inadvertently passed Mods too, a terrible lapse from the standard set by his own aphorism, 'Why win a race by eighteen lengths, when half a length will give you the stakes?'

He immediately represented to his trustees that without taking Moderations, he had most unfortunately established pretensions to

that standard in the course of his matriculation, and that the disbursement of £300 p a which they were prepared to allow him for residence at Oxford would be redundant for the next two years Would it not be more advantageous to 'invest his profits' to better purpose? — and without realising it at the time R instinctively adopted an Arab formula which he was both to learn and to teach me, at a later date 'Trust God, yet tie the camel's leg!'

As the outcome of all this he actually carried his point in theory, whilst opportunity once again produced reality In a few weeks he had joined a couple of bachelors as third partner in their hunting box at Harlaxton, near Grantham, only 6 miles from the Belvoir Kennels at Woolsthorpe Ostensibly this was intended to provide breathing-space for a healthy and obstreperous young animal until such time as his future could be determined, and also, no doubt, to keep him out of mischief But Ronald was beginning to develop quite definite ideas of his own, inspired by the converging influence of four men his father, old Dick of Marlborough, his hero Selous, and of course Maurice Gifford

In the heart of the Belvoir Country this trio ran a big stable, and hunted six days a week either with the Blankney, the Quorn or the Cottesmore as alternatives to their own pack They rode hard over the big Belvoir country, and fast over the fen district They rode systematically as a team, so that if one failed another came to the front They entered into diplomatic relations with Mr Escritt, the Hunting Correspondent of the *Grantham Journal*, and, as a result, the three names appeared in print as regularly as the three cut-away coats performed a sort of relay race in the first flight In my opinion, this light-hearted trio appear to have been nothing less than superfine horse-copers! But they rode with judgment, care and determination, so that when a sound horse commanded a premium, that horse could surely be found in their stables

The social side of the Shires passed them by for the most part Life was too strenuous, but Maurice Giford also lived in the Belvoir country He rode to hounds on stocky little half-breds, with a runner on his bridoon rein, and he worked his way out of crowds at gaps and gates as if possessed of two arms instead of one R saw much of him, of course I think that perhaps M G must have been instrumental in obtaining Ronald's admission to the pink brigade

Maurice Gifford met his future bride in the hunting-field, married her within a month, for it was not his way to stay about watching the grass grow, and was seen no more with the Belvoir

Robin Lubbock was killed when making a point alone with Ronald, and one of General Parkinson's daughters broke both her collar-bones while actually following him

Then Ronald broke his leg As it turned out, this was an event of some importance because it materially influenced the future policy at Harlaxton The month of March was upon them, and following as it did a very hard season, our trio had done extremely well, that is to say, their stable was satisfactorily depleted It seemed apparent, therefore, that the purchase and schooling of young horses would occupy them during the summer months, and Ronald's accident was used as an added reason for keeping him closely concerned with the business of preparing for the next cubbing season Notwithstanding so promising an apprenticeship, however, in a sphere so appropriate to his own inclinations, R was evidently not destined to become a camouflaged horse-dealer

During the summer the 3rd (Militia) Battalion of the Lincolnshire Regiment were invited by Lord Brownlow to Belton Park for their annual training Among their officers was a subaltern named Roland Marsh, working for his Army examination by way of the Militia and whose father at the War Office, Colonel Jeremy Taylor Marsh of the Royal Engineers, was an old friend of Lalla Jackson Being an Irishman, he reared a Victorian family of ten, including six sons for the Army, and of these Roland was the fourth While training at Belton Park, Roland naturally spent many hours shooting rabbits at Harlaxton, and as a result of this contact Ronald in due course received the Queen's Commission as an Officer in the 3rd Lincoln Militia

He was posted forthwith as a recruit Officer to Lincoln Barracks, the Regimental Depot This change involved his appearance occasionally in the heavy Burton country during the next hunting season, for his presence at Lincoln Barracks was officially unavoidable, but on the whole he saw the season through from Harlaxton with commendable fidelity, and appeared regularly with the Belvoir

That year 'business' was as brisk as before They showed the cream of their stud when three hundred guineas was of less account

than a goer in condition with four legs. But that year also their stable produced a prospective candidate for the Grand National. Ronald bought her for £25, and schooled her from first to last. She jumped big, and tremendously fast, had unlimited confidence, and showed great staying power. So they decided to enter her the following year, and develop her with that object from now onwards.

It had become one of Ronald's ambitions to ride his own horse in the Grand National, and subject to the many vicissitudes of a whole year intervening, the possibility of realisation seemed propitious. As a preliminary, however, an extraordinary piece of good fortune had favoured him. In October he had backed Sir George Edwards's *Santoi* at eight to one for the Cesarewitch. Five pounds each way brought him £60 according to the terms then prevailing. So he laid this out in the same proportion on Ambush II for the National at a hundred to one, i.e. £30 each way. This was five months before the race, and because he thought Ambush II, the Prince of Wales's horse, was to be ridden by Reggie Ward,¹ whom he knew. Now Ambush II had won at Aintree, and Ronald's position was improved by £4,500. (He has never put a shilling on a horse from that day to this.)

By way of preparing himself for the great event, he seized every opportunity of riding at Croxton Park and elsewhere until the flat racing season commenced, and schooled all the horses at Hurlaxton as long as the ground remained soft. Then his Battalion was ordered to Salisbury Plain for the summer manoeuvres.

At three o'clock one morning he arrived at Bulford with an advance party to pitch their camp. It was dark, cold and raining hard. The men were hungry, tired and dishevelled, there were several miles to march, there was ample kit to carry, no one knew the way, and altogether soldiering seemed a miserably overrated performance. Then a young Army Service Corps officer reported to Ronald, and entirely altered the complexion of things. A charming fair-haired boy who knew everything, produced his men with dixies containing hot coffee, and quickly dispelled the gloom. He deferred to Ronald upon every point, yet took complete command without appearing to do so, and away they marched in the pouring rain at the dawn of day.

¹ Eventually, however, this intention fell through in favour of Anthony

Before nightfall the camp was pitched and equipped in every respect with methodical precision. The A S C had done it all with some small assistance from the Lincolns' party, but with astonishing efficiency, and that night Ronald dined in the A S C Mess as the guest of his new-found friend.

The next day the Regiment marched in and joined its Brigade at Bulford Camp under Colonel Ian Hamilton. Ronald had trained and lent a half-bred bay hunter mare for use as a charger to his friend, the Adjutant, Captain 'Billy' Harding, of the 1st Battalion, so lest any default of his own should be interpreted as taking advantage of this fact, he was particularly concerned about these preliminary arrangements, and correspondingly grateful to the young A S C officer for the excellence of his guidance and collaboration. He accordingly invited him to dine at his Mess on their first guest night, but was sharply reprimanded. The Army Service Corps were not considered eligible. This was his first experience of pre-1914 Regimental snobbery.

During these manœuvres Ronald's earlier training stood him in good stead, for he was put in charge of Brigade Scouts. His Brigadier, Ian Hamilton, who was under practical examination in the field for higher command, became so complimentary towards the end of the manœuvres about the excellent work of these scouts, that Ronald's prospects of passing into the Army received an impetus which shortly afterwards developed into a *fait accompli*. He sent in his official application submitting a choice of four Cavalry Regiments, to any one of which he asked to be appointed. But he still had to pass the medical examination, and when he presented himself before the Board, they found him below the regulation standard of weight. In vain he explained that he was in racing condition, that given a week he could return and satisfy them, but no! they had to report what they found. The War Office accordingly classified him too light for light Cavalry, and offered him Infantry, so he asked for the line Battalion of his Militia Regiment, and was duly gazetted to the 2nd Lincolns. By the time he was transferred to the 6th Dragoon Guards, this curious relic of obsolete shock tactics had cost him five years' seniority.

He joined his new Battalion at Aldershot, and successfully applied for the Mounted Infantry Company, an innovation for Regiments of the Line ominously prescient of the Boer War.

Life at Malplaquet Barracks was not without attraction to a newly joined subaltern with his future apparently secured and nothing much to fear, but it was not to last long. One memorable night after a somewhat scratch dinner in the Officers' Mess, they rehearsed a parade at 10 p m. Then after a minute and tedious inspection, they returned to their quarters and at midnight paraded again. That time they marched away, headed by the band, and all along the route women in night attire waved them good-bye from windows lighted by flickering candles or guttering lamps. As Ronald tramped along in the dark every man in turn seemed to recognise some friend, or looked out eagerly for some expected face. The sight of these sorrowful and mostly silent partings gave him a curious sense of nostalgia. He felt homesick as though he had never left England before, and thought he was the only one in that crowd whose going kept nobody awake. But perhaps there were many others who thought the same. They marched to Farnborough Junction, and there entrained for Southampton *en route* for South Africa.

The next day the regiment embarked. On the quay and on board pathetic farewells were taking place, and everyone was trying to look as if it were all a daily occurrence. Ronald watched the scene rather wistfully and felt very lonely. A brother officer, Richard Wellesley, came and clutched him. His father, Colonel Wellesley (later Duke of Wellington), was there to see them off, and he gave his son a small silver brandy flask about two and a half inches square. He had two, and gave the other one to Ronald.

CHAPTER 7

1900

THE BOER LEADERS MUST HAVE EMBARKED UPON THEIR SECOND WAR against the British with complete confidence. Their experience of British Military operations would scarcely justify any doubt as to the result. When campaigning shoulder to shoulder with us against the common enemy they had witnessed at Isandhlwana a British battalion attacked right, left and centre, and annihilated by Zulus armed with only spear and shield. They had seen what they believed to be our best troops scuppered at Majuba. They watched a full muster of British manpower, supported by regular troops, struggling to overthrow the primitive Matabele. And lastly they had not only witnessed the pathetic debacle of the Jameson Raid, but had been encouraged to doubt the validity of Queen Victoria's authority and prestige by the Kaiser's open congratulations to their President. Yet in 1838 five hundred Boers had been attacked by Dingaan with ten thousand Zulus, had easily defeated them, inflicting three thousand casualties, and had held their own against native tribes ever since, almost domestically, as part of the daily struggle for life. Of course, the British forces would prove vulnerable against their inspired and mobile tactics.

The opening of the campaign showed British Military reputation true to type. Not only had the Boers inflicted three major reverses at Magersfontein, Stormberg and Colenso in quick succession, but they had also pinned down the British C-in-C, Sir Redvers Buller, to the relief of Ladysmith. In addition, Colonel Kekewich was surrounded and helpless in Kimberley, and Baden-Powell in Mafeking.

England was dismayed. On the 18th of December Lord Roberts was appointed C-in-C, with Lord Kitchener as his Chief of Staff. On the 10th of January he arrived at Capetown, and on the 8th of February he reached Modder River Camp.

In England apparently public opinion demanded the immediate relief of Kimberley, but excepting for the presence there of Cecil Rhodes, and his perpetual S O S messages for urgent relief, it is

not clear why Lord Roberts should have been so importuned. It was said, indeed, that Rhodes had drafted a helio message threatening to muster the civilian members of the garrison with a view to surrender unless they were relieved, and that in reply Lord Roberts had authorised Kekewich to place him under arrest, whereupon Rhodes repented. In any case the Cavalry Division was immediately ordered to reach Ramdam by February 11th, and to relieve Kimberley forthwith. This Division included the 6th Dragoon Guards, and the Mounted Infantry under Colonel Hannay, and the object was to make Cronje release his hold of the strong Magersfontein position dominating Kimberley, by a turning movement towards Rondeval and Klip Drift.

Hannay crossed the Orange River on the 9th. Two days later Colonel De Lisle was out with thirteen hundred men combing the rocky hills round Ramdam, which he found strongly occupied. The 2nd and 7th M I (Ronald's regiment) were thereupon sent out to reinforce him, and were engaged all day. The heat was intense and the absence of water intolerable, for wells had been systematically destroyed except at Ramdam, where water was plentiful. Sunstroke and dust storms added to the distress, while veld sores produced a general order forbidding any man to shave. The demands were therefore very exacting upon men still new to the climate, and horses not yet fully established after their long sea voyage from the Argentine. The havoc was considerable, and at midnight they bivouacked at Roodipan in a thoroughly exhausted state with twenty-four casualties and eleven prisoners lost.

The next day, after a gruelling march of five hours through the heat, they rode into the welcome broad muddy pan of Ramdam. It was impossible to keep the horses *out*, they rushed into it and lay down without waiting to be dismounted.

Subsequently the column moved on to De Kiels Drift, where French had just crossed the Riet River. He marched on across 25 miles of waterless sandy veld to Rondeval Drift on the Modder River, and lost over three hundred horses on the way. At De Kiels Drift Ronald saw 47 guns being hauled over the steep sandy drift by four hundred men on drag ropes, in addition to their teams of sixteen span of oxen. The business of war was becoming a reality.

Then Colonel Hannay moved off, leaving the 7th M I with Lord Roberts's Headquarters, and that night R was detailed for outpost duty. It was a cold bleak night and raining heavily. He posted his men and 'felt' the pickets on each side of his section, he went his rounds at regular intervals — a jumpy business in the dark with raw troops, much more liable to fire first than to challenge — and at 3 a m he heard a shot inside the line not far behind him. Someone letting off a rifle by accident perhaps. But when daylight came the bivouacs had disappeared, and all he found was the dead body of an orderly sent out probably to call him in. Ronald's troop had been left, and might be surrounded. He mustered his men at once, retired to the horses and held a council of action.

The main body would have had about two hours' start for a destination unknown, it was therefore hopeless to rejoin, and equally impracticable to return. So he decided to find his way to Wegdraai, about 5 miles from Jacobsdal.

During all these exhausting marches Ronald had seldom ridden without the company of his little spaniel Nellie. This little dog had developed and maintained an absolute personality of her own, she was his constant companion, and the devoted colleague of his groom, his soldier servant and the whole troop. Nellie's origin was obscure, but she first came on the strength of the Regiment when Ronald bought her for 10s from a Kaffir suspected of having stolen her from a white nurse. Nellie's many photographs, posing with her men, show a very dainty little black and white spaniel type bitch with a suggestion of fox-terrier blood. Nevertheless, she was an aristocrat in every sense. She was always beautifully groomed and as white as snow. She was the only scrupulously clean member of her unit in spite of the lice on her human colleagues. She went short of rations, and she slept in Ronald's fleabag to their mutual advantage. She endured all the heavy marching of that period, and when the pace was too great, or she became tired, her front paws could just reach Ronald's stirrup iron, so he lifted her on to his holster, and there she lay, holding on of her own accord, just as though he were seated in an armchair and she on his knees.

In the early hours of the morning they rode into Jacobsdal, off-saddled, and R reported to General Kelly, the D A G Jacobs-

dal had been taken the previous afternoon and it was the encouraging sight of the Union Jack fluttering in the breeze which diverted him from Wegdraai. He asked for directions so that he might rejoin his unit. He said that he had eighteen men and that two had been lost on the way. General Kelly seemed amused, he must have been a particularly charming man to concern himself personally about the doings of a Junior Subaltern when affairs of the highest importance on the Headquarters Staff, and indeed of the whole army, were monopolising his every thought, but things were done rather in that way under Lord Roberts, and besides, this was beginning to develop into a 'Subaltern's War'.

A convoy of two hundred wagons with its escort of three hundred and fifty rifles had reached Waterval Drift, and was being heavily attacked by De Wet's commando, reinforcements were being sent back and Ronald was directed to ration his men and horses, and report to the officer in command at Waterval Drift as soon as he could get there. So discovering nothing further, he saddled up without more ado and rode off.

They arrived and halted. Ronald climbed a kope to reconnoitre the approach, found a small column of mounted infantry on the low ground to his right, and after closer examination he reported just in time to Colonel Bainbridge of the Buffs in command of the 7th M I — by coincidence his own regiment.

Under Bainbridge the little force advanced in extended order towards a ridge of kopjes held by the Boers. They continued thus for about half a mile to within six hundred yards of the Boer position. They were under a desultory fire which did little damage. Then the Boers decided apparently to evacuate the position. Colonel Bainbridge continued his advance and presently, behind and between the kopjes, Boers could be seen galloping across his front in considerable numbers.

Our men were now some nine hundred yards from their starting-point, and in flat country with no shelter. On their right flank and parallel with it was a similar string of kopjes, and suddenly it became evident that the Boers had evacuated their first position only to man a second, and that the manœuvre had been beautifully timed and executed so as to catch the skirmishing line on the flank and in the open. Bainbridge immediately changed direction to face the new front. The Boers took up their position and held

their fire, but as our men advanced again to within 'fixed sight' range, five hundred yards, they came under a withering fire Men began to drop, led horses in the rear became restive, and Bainbridge suddenly shouted, 'My God, this is too hot! Retire!' Every man who could get to his horse mounted and galloped off, it was a straggling disorderly rout, and to make matters worse, the remaining horses stampeded too

Ronald found himself amongst the few still trying to catch a loose animal, but he succeeded at last and mounted At that moment a man was hit close to him He stopped, and helped him on to his own horse, saying, 'Go steady, I will hang on to the stirrup leather,' but the horse bolted with its wounded rider, and left him

By this time he, and others in like case, were almost isolated After considerable difficulty he managed to catch a second horse and started off again, but a bullet went through the fleshy part of his left thigh, and brought his horse down on to its nose Then Ronald started running for cover nearly half a mile away

He was getting on admirably, and every yard brought him into less concentrated fire, but each running man was none the less a target Presently — it seemed a very long time — he saw someone coming back to him with a led horse The fire lifted from him to the pair galloping towards him, and he redoubled his efforts Then he recognised his Sergeant, Murphy, lying low on his horse's neck, riding like a madman, with bullets spitting up the ground all round Murphy never let go his leading rein, but wheeled and started back when Ronald was still climbing into the saddle They made an excellent target, because there was now practically nothing else for De Wet's entire commando to fire at Then Murphy's horse was shot, and after seven or eight strides turned a complete somersault over him, Ronald fell off too, but fortunately kept hold of his rein and remounted, Murphy recovered, caught hold of R's stirrup leather, and at last they came out of range together behind the shelter of rising ground

They took stock of themselves Ronald's thigh was apparently only a flesh wound Loose horses were careering about here and there, so Murphy got busy There was no one to be seen, as the flight had continued towards Jacobsdal Then they hacked back as though returning from a day's hunting, and, leaving Murphy

to round up the lost troop, Ronald reported again to the long-suffering General Kelly

That day, it turned out, had contributed yet another disaster. The supply column of two hundred wagons — together with sixteen hundred oxen stampeded and lost to us — had been captured by De Wet. It contained two hundred thousand rations and forty-eight thousand issues of forage, equal to eight days' supply for Lord Roberts's army, and all his medical stores. The result was that the whole Army remained on half rations until the end of February. Not only did cavalry horses receive eight instead of fourteen pounds of oats, but subsequently at Paardeberg there was a complete lack of medical equipment. And the remarkable fact remains that a convoy containing such valuable material, and extending in length to 6 or 7 miles, should have been allowed to advance through a hostile country with an escort of only two hundred men, and a total of three hundred and fifty rifles. The Boer belief in the British way of warfare was by no means an illusion.

This time General Kelly presented Ronald with a real job. Colonel Henry, he explained, commanding the 4th M I — a Battalion which had already made a name for itself as 'Henry's Mounted Infantry' — had been wounded while on reconnaissance just before the taking of Jacobsdal, but he was extremely anxious to get back to his regiment. All the M I had moved on to Klip Drift, so Ronald had better follow and take Colonel Henry too. If he would act as escort to the wounded officer, he should report to him forthwith. Ronald was gratified, expressed himself suitably, and went off to find Colonel Henry.

He discovered a very charming, well-knit, slight little man, all strapped up, yet quite undaunted by a shattered collar-bone. R protested that he was scarcely fit to undertake so rough a journey, but he seemed to think that extremely humorous. Promising to return, R sought out the resourceful Murphy. Sergeant Murphy solved the problem by stealing two beautiful young Boer ponies, and an excellent well-sprung Cape cart. Then he commandeered a Kaffir Boy to drive, and the remnants of the troop saddled up, and stood to their horses, while Colonel Henry was collected.

Once clear of Jacobsdal they formed a circle radiating three or four hundred yards from the central Cape cart, and proceeded in

this formation to Klip Drift The cart was obviously in for a very rough journey over the uneven ground, and seemed to be bouncing its passengers about unmercifully — for Nellie had been put in too R was anxious about Colonel Henry, however, firstly because of his condition, and secondly because he knew him to be a valuable officer, whose loss, if they ran into trouble, would be his responsibility Presently he rode up to the cart and asked if Colonel Henry approved of the arrangement ‘We are doing splendidly, my dear boy’ he laughed, ‘but it’s not *my* business, you’re in command here’

The track was strewn with carcases of dead horses, and at Klip Drift the passage of the Cavalry Division had accounted for over three hundred more Otherwise the place was deserted They waited only long enough to water, off-saddle, outspan and rest, before going about 8 or 10 miles farther to Klip Kraal Drift

Not long afterwards they overhauled and passed what Ronald describes as one of the most memorable and inspiring sights he has ever seen — the Highland Brigade marching to Paardeberg ‘A more grim and purposeful picture would be difficult to imagine,’ he wrote ‘Here were these seasoned and thoroughly matured campaigners [they had come from India] swinging along over rough ground in heat which was killing horses by the hundred, through hellish dust storms, alternating with incredible rain storms, for neither seemed to allay the other Every officer carried two, and sometimes even three rifles to relieve individual men Many of them had puttees or torn-off strips of kilts wrapped round their feet or heads, to understudy battered boots or lost helmets, and some even wore bandages Their faces were set, begrimed and parched, their countenances speechless but determined They had been whipped to shreds at Magersfontein, where, owing to the appalling weather and visibility, General Wauchope failed to deploy until within 400 yards of the Boer trenches, so that he lost 60 per cent of his officers and 37 per cent of his men, and now the remainder were marching straight into action at Paardeberg

‘They had moved into Jacobsdal at 3 a.m. and were bivouacked at Paardeberg before midnight By that time they had covered about thirty-six miles in a little more than twenty-four hours The sight reminded me of Meissonier’s 1812 “Retreat from Moscow” (or the “Crossing of the Beresina” in the Wirtz Gallery at Brussels),

but translated from the despair of cold to the destruction of heat
And it made me feel very small'

At Klip Kraal Drift there was equally no sign except that the Army had moved still farther, and at Paardeberg Ronald took leave of Colonel Henry and, without making further approach to anyone, he attended to his men and horses for the night

The next morning long before dawn this little handful of eighteen men were whispering down their chagrined horses, and endeavouring to make good, wherever possible, the ravages of travel. Horsemastership at this early period of the War scarcely existed, and much of the loss experienced, by Mounted Infantry especially, was the result of neglect, or total absence of discipline in the ranks when on the march. Men were permitted to loll about anyhow on their horses. Saddles were not adjusted to avoid saddle galls. Girths were allowed to set up friction, producing sores. And finally horses were often cast, in the absence of sick lines, or merely shot and left, if the rider could find any alternative transport.

The mortality in horseflesh was unbelievable, and the inter-regimental horse thieving was almost worse. When therefore a man, or a troop chanced to be well mounted, it behoved the interested party to keep a sharp look out lest some conjuring trick produced an astonishing change. It goes almost without saying that — for one reason or another — two such men as Sergeant Murphy and his officer were often short of sleep.

Ronald now began looking round for the next move. Brigade or Divisional Staff Officers were obsessed with their own affairs and either knew little of what was going on generally, or assumed a discreet ambiguity.

Ronald was nonplussed, so he consulted his map in the hope at least of identifying certain landmarks. Paardeberg, a hill dominating the whole situation, was the other side of the river, and well away to the west. It seemed to be outside the immediate zone of operations. Paardeberg Drift was farther back still, and heavy firing had just started apparently from Kameelfontein about $4\frac{1}{2}$ miles to the north, while close at hand from Wolveskraal, the next drift 5 miles beyond Paardeberg, both pom-pom and rifle fire seemed to locate the Boers in the river-bed. These were the outstanding facts (according to his note-book) which R could discover shortly after ten o'clock on Sunday, the 18th February.

His next concern was to find his regiment, but in the turmoil of movement and counter-movement, of confusion, perplexity and uncertainty, it seemed like combing a haystack for its proverbial needle. Presently someone told him that the 7th M I had crossed the river and were probably engaged on the north side.

Shortly afterwards a staff officer said, 'Get your men over the river into the firing-line.' Accordingly he examined the river, and was met by a most angry and forbidding sight. At this point it made a wide convex sweep, was about sixty yards broad, and, normally shallow, was now swollen breast high by the recent rains. The current was running too fast for wading by men heavily laden with their equipment and fully charged ammunition bandoliers. The bank on each side, some forty feet high, was fringed by mimosa bush and other vegetation, extending into the open veld beyond for perhaps two or three hundred yards, and the fact that Cronje had established his laager at a similar spot several hundred yards upstream was immediately evident owing to the number of carcasses of horses and oxen which came hurtling down on the flood. The situation was clearly difficult, and likely to become worse hour by hour as the volume of water increased.

At length Ronald selected the least objectionable-looking place, returned to his men, and leaving the horses in the care of his groom and servant he equipped the remaining sixteen with biscuit rations and ammunition, and marched down to the chosen spot. Here they rehearsed the crossing. Arm in arm they would obviously be swept away, so they linked their hands, thus affording a less compact obstacle to the tide, though not reaching the distance. Ronald led the chain. Twice he was completely submerged and, with the four leading files, was swept back, and away from the opposite bank. They hauled to shore again, and he sent back to the troop for their surcingles. These doubled their extended length while enabling them to offer a still more flexible resistance. They made a third attempt diagonally against the stream, but with Corporal Barker, a heavier man, this time to make weight ahead of Ronald. These two leaned backwards against the tide and led, but were both conscious of leading into trouble.

After desperate struggles and repeated loss of foothold, they at length scrambled to the opposite side, but the line was broken by a floating carcase, and two men losing hold were hurled away and

drowned, followed almost immediately by the last file, who also lost his footing and let go just as they were hauling him out. The undaunted little Nellie, too, had plunged unhesitatingly into the angry torrent and was immediately tossed away out of sight and out of control, but by some miracle she crossed, was thrown ashore a long way down the river, and promptly rejoined.

Thus thirteen men climbed up through the mimosa and drew breath. But it was a dispiriting performance, and the misery of the moment cried out for action. Ronald went forward to reconnoitre the position.

Reaching the edge of the scrub, he saw the firing-line lying flat some distance away in the open. He wiped his field-glasses and tried to pick up the units, but he could make out nothing. They appeared to be a composite collection of details, including some of the Highland Brigade. He went back, and then in very extended order, for the Boer rifle fire was sweeping about two thousand yards of flat unsheltered ground, his little party eventually reached the line at eleven-thirty by a process of successive rushes, and crawling.

At the point where Ronald threw himself headlong into the firing-line, he found Captain Arnold of the Canadians at his side, and Moneypenny of the Seaforths next but one beyond, but his own men were scattered, and he saw them no more.

The Boers were entrenched in the shelter of the thin bush bordering the river and kept well out of sight. Nevertheless, our line had found the exact range, and were raking the ground with a steady fire at seven hundred yards. No one knew who was in command, or by what units the line was manned. To the combination of details R had now added his thirteen men. There were Canadians, Seaforths, Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, and farther along, a Captain Dewar of the Rifle Brigade, presumably with some of his own people, but beyond that nothing was known.

It was now nearly midday and the heat was extremely trying. Occasionally a man was hit, and presently word was passed down that a Boer sniper had been spotted up a tree. Every glass was immediately focused in search of him, and there he was lying along a branch and deliberately picking off selected individuals. For over half an hour, each self-appointed marksman tried to bring him down, but he remained apparently lying inert to avoid notice,

although his sniping ceased Afterwards his body was reported, riddled, and lashed full length to the tree branch

At 2 p m by the watch on Ronald's wrist there appeared, at the very place where he had emerged from the river bank, an officer bringing up reinforcements He left his men under cover, and came along himself by short rushes, reaching the exact spot beside Arnold where R had arrived He was Colonel Aldworth of the Cornwall Light Infantry, with two Companies of his own regiment He wanted to know who was in command? why the line had not advanced? what estimate had been made of the enemy's strength? and various other questions, to not one of which could any satisfactory answer be given Then he said he would go back and bring up his two Companies, and that on arrival in the rear of the firing-line he would take command, fix bayonets and charge

Moneypenny, a senior subaltern, ventured to protest, explaining that the distance had been accurately found to be seven hundred yards, at which range they had been firing for over two hours To charge from there over ground as flat as a billiard table would inevitably end in failure, and must be suicidal, and he went so far as to ask Colonel Aldworth if he was acting on staff orders To this Colonel Aldworth replied, 'No, but it is the only thing to do,' and directing the three officers at his side to see that the whole line was informed of his intention, he left as he had come, and returned without mishap to his own men

Presently they could be seen deploying into open order, and advancing They crawled and made short rushes by sections Quite soon they were disposed like a rear rank to the firing-line, to left and right of their Commanding Officer, who again joined Arnold, Moneypenny and Ronald

Allowing for a short breathing-space, he passed word both ways down the line to fix bayonets Another interval, then 'The line will charge as the Cornwalls come through' Almost immediately afterwards this gallant officer stood up, waved his arm and ordered, 'The Cornwalls and the whole line will charge'

Up jumped the Cornwalls and up jumped the entire line with Aldworth leading A roar as if the distance had been fifty yards instead of half a mile, and a thousand men kept up a mighty shout as they went



RONALD HOLDING NELLIE

On his left - and Lieutenant Dugan (now Major General Sir Winston Dugan K.C.M.G., C.B., D.S.O., Governor General of Victoria and ex Governor of South Australia)

The first to go down, that Ronald saw, was Aldworth himself—three days later they said that his body had been hit over thirty times. The next man was Moneypenny, who staggered towards Ronald as he fell, and R slipped the little emergency flask, which Colonel Wellesley had given him, from his breast pocket, throwing it to him as he ran. He looked back, and saw Moneypenny struggling with a portable camera in an attempt to photograph the scene. But he was killed.

Gradually the line dwindled, and R looked about him to see what numbers were following. He was becoming uncomfortably isolated but was conscious of a little white object panting at his side—Nellie charging Cronje's laager, too. And, supposing he ever got there, what was he to do? The noise was terrific, the conditions bewildering, and the pace killing. Perhaps he was running too fast. Perhaps too slowly! He could see nothing, he was becoming heavy-footed and giddy, he stumbled, and then—a shock like ten sledge-hammers, synchronised for a single mighty blow in the chest, flung him to the ground.

How he fell, how he was hit, or by what, remained a mystery. But there he was flat on his stomach with one arm bent under his face and a heart pumping wildly.

He became aware of the watch on his left wrist, it fascinated him, and he vaguely observed the hands were moving slowly beyond the hour of three. Nellie was lying motionless beside his shoulder. There was a dull thud, something touched him and a voice said, 'Are you hit?'

Young Hylton-Jolliffe, only recently gazetted to the Coldstream Guards, had fallen almost on top of him. Then someone from quite close behind threatened, 'For God's sake lie still, or I'll shoot you myself.' It all seemed very far away, yet perfectly clear, and nobody appeared to be moving.

Then a terrific shock like the swinging blow of a crowbar, and a bullet whizzed between the wrist-watch and his eyebrow, and went through Ronald's shoulder. But there was no pain at all, simply an intense dullness and a feeling of relief. Jolliffe began moving uneasily, the same bullet had struck his left knee-joint, it expanded and severed the leg. He rolled into Ronald, then rolled back. The voice behind yelled again, this time there was no doubt, Jolliffe's condition was serious and he was unavoidably creating a

target A bullet passed Ronald's face, a sickening thud and Jolliffe's body was raked They were lying not more than fifty or sixty yards from Cronje's laager, and, standing unconcernedly above their breastworks, the Boers were taking deliberate shots at anything that moved Nellie presented a deadly target which R thought would be fatal, he whispered to her to keep still, she understood and froze

Hours passed Poor Jolliffe was hit ten times and lay still 'And that devilish pom-pom, a two-pounder machine gun, did more to demoralise the confidence than any volume of rifle fire The sound of its shell came with a lazy crescendo, yet seemingly with unrelenting certainty, and each time the same laboured effort of that "bloody constipated pom-pom" made every living body squirm'

Shortly after seven Jolliffe murmured, 'If I can get both my legs off at once, I may live' One was already off, and the other barely connected

The sun went down, and suddenly it was dark Ronald tried to get up, but he was too stiff Nellie moved too for the first time in five hours He tried again and stumbled away

'What the hell are you retiring for?' someone challenged out of the gloom

'Trying to find a stretcher,' said Ronald, and he fell

When he recovered, two hefty bearded men, a Seaforth and a Canadian, were diligently strapping him up with puttees removed from dead bodies These excellent fellows, quite unable to discover in the dark and the mess which limbs remained intact, were busily swathing him like a mummy He revived and protested, so they disentangled him, leaving his useless arm still pinioned closely to his side

'Where did I come from?' he asked, and they seemed to know Then he begged them to fetch Jolliffe, who could only be a few feet away So they carried him over, and he was still alive He gave Ronald his keys and the contents of his pockets, he asked him to explain the circumstances to his father — 'Charles Street, Berkeley Square' — he whispered And then he died

CHAPTER 8

1901

SOMEWHERE ABOUT NINE O'CLOCK ON THAT SUNDAY NIGHT RONALD was laid and left under the lee of a large boulder. It was quite dark, bitterly cold by contrast with the heat of the day, and torrential rain fell with such vicious force that the protecting rock afforded a sense of real luxury. Presently his consciousness became deadened and his body numbed. The roar of the river in spate, drowning all other sounds, fascinated him. He waited patiently for the moon to appear at intervals through the black clouds. He scanned the furious waters hurtling beneath him. He was wet, cold and miserable, but felt no pain, and was too stiff to move. With Nellie curled close against his body, he watched and meditated throughout the long night.

It was nearly dawn when he sensed, rather than saw, a figure staggering towards him bearing a heavy load, a Private of the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, brought up abruptly by the swollen river, lurched heavily within a few feet of him. He laid down his unconscious burden as R had been placed some hours previously — the body, an officer of his own regiment. He straightened himself, with one hand he unbuckled his kilt and at that moment the moon shone out brightly for the last time before daylight. His left arm had been blown away at the shoulder. He spread his kilt about the motionless figure and lay down himself on its weather side. In the morning he was dead, but he must have carried his officer for five or six hundred yards at least. Captain Grant, his Company Commander, lived, recovered, and eventually learned this story from Ronald. He pensioned his rescuer's next of kin.

All that day and the next night they remained there. It was not possible to throw a pontoon bridge across the river. Time after time the sappers had tried and failed, so the casualties were left as they fell. Moreover, all the pontoon transport had been urgently required by the Quartermaster-General's Staff to replace the two hundred commissariat wagons lost at Waterval Drift, so in any

case it would have been impossible to mobilise any R E equipment. On the Wednesday morning a hand ferry hauled across by a fixed guide rope carried them over four at a time, and they were laid stark and stiff in rows for surgical inspection. On R's right lay Captain Arnold of the Canadians, his forehead, skull and, apparently, his brain blown away, yet still alive and seemingly conscious since he thanked an orderly for putting water to his lips. On his left, Captain Dewar, of the Rifle Brigade, shot in the stomach and suffering great agony. Both died. Because of the lost convoy few medical stores were available, yet the surgeons, stripped to the waist, worked without respite or rations, using two planks supported on biscuit-boxes as an operating-table.

Presently Ronald became aware that Private White, his servant, was sitting beside him. The first bullet had gone through the heart and left a clean wound, he heard them say. All the nerves in the left shoulder were severed. They pulled them out with forceps and tied them together with no anaesthetic, but Ronald felt nothing. Then they carried him back to his place in the line of stretcher cases.

White did not leave him. He explained how he had watched and waited, how Sergeant Murphy had survived, but no one else in the troop had shown up yet. He went away to fetch Sergeant Murphy and they both sat on the ground beside Ronald. The 7th M I, they told him, had crossed the river early on Sunday morning. They had been heavily punished, losing 22 per cent of their strength, and had retired to Paardeberg Drift, just about the time that Ronald was struggling to reach the firing-line. They were relating these things when two curious coincidences happened.

A Private of the Seaforths walking down the line of stretchers noticed White and Murphy both labelled 7th M I. He had seen one of their officers throw a little silver flask to Moneypenny, he produced it — perhaps they could discover the owner. It was Ronald's.

Then Colonel Neville Chamberlain, Private Secretary to Lord Roberts, came. He congratulated Ronald, Colonel Henry had reported him for excellent work, etc., the C-in-C would forward a message home if Ronald wished, and Sir Neville took down a telegram addressed to Ronald's mother. It subsequently trans-

pired that she found his name published in the list of killed, but fortunately Lord Roberts's telegram had arrived first

Then came a terrible three days' journey in trek ox-wagons over the rough veld to the railway at Modder River. These wagons were unchanged in type since those primitive days of the old Boer *voortrekkers* some sixty years before. They were stoutly built like wooden sailing ships. They had no springs of any sort, they were tarred to withstand the fording of rivers, and they were greased with mutton fat. Their huge broad wheels with a five-foot axle were powerful enough to stand the shock of bodily upheaval by a whirlwind or dust-devil which could throw a laden wagon fifty yards away to land again, if fortunate, right side up, but more often on its beam ends. Over all they were covered by a heavy canvas hood or *telt* which, in such circumstances, would be stripped off and tossed away, like autumn leaves in a hurricane. Each seventeen-foot wagon with its eight span of oxen covered some twenty-five yards of track, and to avoid dust travelled at double this distance from the one in front. In this way some seven hundred wounded were transported, from four or six serious casualties to each wagon and as many sitting cases as possible in others. So the convoy extended for several miles. They travelled at about three miles per hour, halted every four hours, bivouacked during the heat of the day, laagered up at sunset, and inspanned again an hour before dawn. There was no escort and of course no road or beaten track.

In R's wagon there were four wounded officers including himself. A Major Gubbins of the Oxford Light Infantry, whose knee was full of buckshot, a gentleman named Alderson who, incredible though it seems, had managed to retain possession of an X-pattern camp bed, now set up for his additional comfort on the extremely limited floor-space. R lay on his right shoulder between this and the side, the fourth man was stretched beneath its framework, where he remained without moving — having died at the outset, possibly from claustrophobia, when the bed was pitched above him — while Gubbins sat or curled up as best he could athwart the tail-board.

The convoy moved off to the guttural cry of the *voorloopers* 'Loop, loop,' they yelled as they hauled upon the *reims*, attached to the horns of their leading span, and laid about them with their

rhinoceros-hide *sjamboks*. The heavy raw-hide *trektouw* — built up of twisted and plaited *reims* — tautened from span to span until it straightened and stretched from the creaking *disselboom* and took the whole strain of the load. Then these great ponderous wagons would lurch forward, pitching and rolling without mercy over ant-hummocks and rocks to the continued accompaniment of shouts and cracks like rifle-shots, as the conductors, joining in the tumult, wielded the heavy two-handled bamboo stocks of their thirty-foot giraffe-skin whip-thongs.

Alderson did not die, he was well enough in fact to take occasional short strolls during the regular halts or when they out-spanned for the night. At last they arrived at Modder River station and the survivors were sorted and entrained.

Their troubles, however, were not over, for, somewhere short of Graaspan, about half-way to Orange River, the whole cargo of wounded were lifted out and left in blazing sunshine on the veld without escort, food or water, while the train picked up a column of fresh troops marching to the front along the railway line, and steamed slowly back on its single-line track. These were details of the Highland Brigade required by Lord Roberts, and as Lord Kitchener, with unquestionable logic, had issued orders that wounded men were of no use to him, our unfortunates were thus temporarily abandoned in favour of sound troops.

That night a real, properly equipped train came up, took them all on board and camped there for the night — the railway only functioned by daylight, this was No 3 Ambulance Train.

The following day at Orange River Station there appeared a little kindly man with a dramatic wealth of compassionate understanding hidden beneath an ironclad protective surface. He joined the train and forthwith devoted his entire time to writing letters home for the more severely wounded and signing them himself, he found time for little else during the three days' journey to Cape Town, he also shared his own rations with the hospital cases, subsisting, apparently, without food, for victuals were at a premium on that trip, R had had very little to eat since the day on which he was put out of action. The little man's autograph at that moment commanded approximately the cash value of a ration biscuit — which was not less than ten shillings. He had only just

come out from England on board the *Kinfauns Castle*, and he was Rudyard Kipling

On arriving at Cape Town, R. was sent to Wynberg Hospital where, by providential decree it would seem, he was placed in the identical bed vacated that morning by his cousin Claud of the Seaforth Highlanders, who had been shot through the brain at Magersfontein

There were eighteen beds in the ward, nine on each side. R.'s was the second in sequence on the north side and thus No. 11. Surgical operations were performed in the centre of the ward, and a surgeon named Fox-Symons inspected the new arrivals. His comment after examining R. was 'whiff and a snip at ten o'clock to-morrow morning,' a whimsical way of saying that the left arm would then be amputated.

At 10 a.m. Fox-Symons commenced operating on Major Gubbins of the Oxford Light Infantry and the buckshot knee, when in through the French windows opening from R.'s end of the ward walked the two celebrated surgeons Makins and MacCormac. They had been watching the case of Claud, whose survival after a high-velocity bullet through the brain was at that time new to the medical world. They turned therefore as usual to No. 11 bed, not knowing that Claud had been replaced by Ronald, and of course noticed at once that while the patient had disappeared, the surname on the hospital chart remained unchanged. This seeming irregularity was explained by the orderly, and attracted their interest towards the new occupant. Ronald's case intrigued them as Claud's had done, and the curious coincidence proved extremely valuable since the left arm was not amputated, but remains intact and in useful working order to the present time, while the two examples so closely related in a double sense produced a lasting impression upon the medical mind.

(Some twenty years later, and before my marriage, I was sitting at the Lord Mayor's Guildhall Banquet next to the then President of the Royal College of Surgeons, Sir Berkeley Moynihan. He seemed deeply impressed by the appearance of Ronald positively weighed down by decorations, medals, ribbons and God wot. When, by request, I told him who this was, he exclaimed, 'Is he the fellow who was shot through the brain in the Boer War?'

'No, that was his cousin Claud,' I replied

'Then he must be the fellow who was shot through the heart, they appear to be both heartless *and* brainless in that family!' said this incorrigible Irishman, and after that by special arrangement we three sat together year after year on the occasion of that particular banquet.)

The next day two visitors came to Wynberg Hospital Maurice Gifford had placed his services at the disposal of the Intelligence Department in Cape Town, and, seeing R's name on the list of wounded admitted to Wynberg, he came out to see him This visit synchronised with that of Rudyard Kipling, who arrived with gifts, and his own diverting personality, for his recent fellow-passengers on No 3 Ambulance Train Thus these two little men, so curiously alike physically, and sharing a kindly feeling for R, came to be sitting one on each side of his bed

The badinage opened of course on his condition, the rescue of his arm The loss of it, thought Maurice, would have saved an infinity of trouble But he preserved a discreet silence about the patient's age disclosed upon the hospital chart hung at the head of his bed, for he knew that R had 'cooked' this information when enlisting in the Matabele Police

'Anyhow,' said Kipling, 'you were born on the twenty-eighth of December! That's very odd because my first child was born on the twenty-ninth, I myself on the thirtieth and my wife on the thirty-first'

And it came to pass that he presented Ronald with a black brocade dressing-gown Nor was this the only gift or kindness bestowed upon him in company with all hospital patients, for ladies who had come out from England and were now residing in Cape Town, or the neighbourhood, were unremitting in their hospitality to convalescents awaiting transport home, and the provision of primary comforts for wounded men

Ronald and his cousin Claud, of the Seaforts, were both embarked on the transport *Pembroke Castle* carrying the first contingent of wounded to be returned to England Three weeks later they arrived off Plymouth, after losing half the bridge and boat-deck during a gale in the Bay of Biscay They spent a stormy night cruising slowly about in the Channel while the Mayor of Plymouth made ready to give them a Civic Reception on the

morrow, and huge enthusiastic crowds supported this rather embarrassing attention

Claud left England again immediately with his wife for the Riviera, where he recovered sufficiently to pass the official Army examination as an interpreter in Russian, and he was then appointed a 'King's Foreign Service Messenger'. But eventually the several bullet wounds in his head and the passage of one through the brain destroyed him. He died ten years later.

Ronald's bullet wound through the heart healed with surprisingly little inconvenience, but the wound in his shoulder completely paralysed the left arm, and the flesh wound in his left thigh had contracted the muscles and made him temporarily very lame. These misfortunes compelled inaction, and very shortly this enforced idleness became irksome, so, when he met a certain Colonel Montanaro, tremendous schemes were immediately laid to join the West African Field Force and the Lake Chad expedition, which was at that time being prepared by direction of the Colonial Office.

The object of this expedition was primarily the settlement of a religious difference, accompanied by wholesale human sacrifice. After an interview with Joseph Chamberlain, the Colonial Secretary, R. was seconded from the War Office, provided he could pass the Medical Board. This, however, in accordance with the British system, did not take place until after he had gone through the appropriate courses of gunnery, transport and handling of native troops. The Board at once rejected him, not on account of physical disability, but of the climate. The verdict against West Africa did, however, give him the opportunity of inducing the War Office to pass him fit to rejoin his regiment in South Africa. He sailed in the *Wakool*, a troopship of which the senior officer happened to be the famous Colonel Sam Steel, who commanded the original Strathcona's Horse from Canada and was now proceeding to a higher appointment. He was accorded the Captain's cabin on the boat-deck, but refused to undertake the duties of O.C. Troops on board because, said he 'my job begins when I get there'. He smoked enormous black cigars and insisted upon emptying a bottle of whiskey as soon as the cork was drawn. This last procedure included assistance by anyone, short of a sentry, who appeared on the boat-deck, which by common consent was

therefore given a wide berth On this account, and because Colonel Steel allowed him to resist his inevitable whiskey, R enjoyed his friendship and benefited greatly thereby But such was the strength of this extraordinary man that from the moment he set foot ashore at Cape Town he neither drank nor smoked anything, and although he scaled eighteen stone his horsemastership was so astonishing that he subsequently rode the same horse from Pretoria to Rustenberg and back, a distance of 72 miles, in one day R rode with him

An equally remarkable individual called Kelly was his body-servant, of reputed gentle birth which he must however have renounced at a very early age He was as likely to miss his aim with rope or gun, by which should be understood lasso or revolver, as a Mayfair hostess directing a morsel from plate to palate with her table fork Human life apparently meant no more to him than the convenience of the survivor, who until then had of course been himself, and all these gifts he applied to the sole advantage of his Chief, the huge receptacle of his unrestricted devotion

Colonel Steel also made R known to the Second in Command of Strathcona's, one Major Ross This hardy warrior from the Wild West was the hero of exploits sufficiently hair-raising to create concern about one's own scalp! He was operating at that time in the Riet Valley, Western District of Pretoria, with a motley of twelve men, a machine gun and no transport His chief henchman was a certain Jerry Potts, a half-caste American Indian who, like his colleagues, found life in others superfluous, subject only to the idiosyncrasies of his leader He wore his long black hair in two thick plaits on each side of his cruel but handsome face A single eagle feather lay back from his head at a rakish angle and formed his only headgear For the rest he was clothed in heavily beaded buckskins, a buffalo robe, shaps and moccasins, but behind each shoulder there hung a human scalp and round his neck a string of stained horses' teeth He presented a picturesque though formidable appearance with his weapons, and rope coiled over the pommel of a saddle-tree, girthed skin tight over the brightest-coloured blankets procurable

The mobility of this pocket commando gave it a striking power more dangerous and deadly than the onslaught of a properly regulated British Column It happened, however, that the Western

District was under the command of General Barton, whose chivalrous procedure in war was much too gentle for Ross, so he forsook the field of action and led his small following back into Pretoria

Outside Kruger's recent State residence, with its marble eagles (presented in January, 1896, after the Jameson Raid by Barney Barnato as a bribe for the release of his nephew Solly Joel), the Cameron Highlanders were on guard and doing sentry-go Inside, Lord Kitchener was at work Major Ross rode up, followed by his twelve swashbucklers, swung himself out of the saddle, passed the impeccable sentries and into the presence of Kitchener 'Say, Baas,' he almost shouted, and R had this direct from Captain Maxwell, who was Kitchener's A D C and in his room at the time, 'Say, Baas, I ain't going to be — about any by that little —' but the remainder of this speech, including as it did certain personal references to General Barton, is not repeatable Kitchener knew his man and forthwith wrote an order authorising him to draw rations and forage on signature, and to act independently

At this time R was still half paralysed from wounds, and after trekking for months with his Regiment all over the country and in most trying weather, he was finally judged unfit for this exacting type of mounted warfare, and seconded to a local Command covering 15 miles of the Magaliesberg Mountains, with Delaray to the north, De Wet to the south, and orders to hold the position against both His Headquarters were at Commando Nek, a spot 22 miles from Pretoria, dominating a pass through which flowed the Crocodile River side by side with the main road to Rustenburg, and providing the principal helio station of the Western District

One day a young Boer veld-kornet rode in under the protection of a white flag He left a letter addressed to Major Ross, which was duly delivered to R When Ross arrived with his crowd some days later R met him down in the pass and handed him the letter He perused it, asked for the loan of a pencil, and scribbled a few words on the back He then invited R to read both the message and the reply and to return the paper whence it came The former was from one of Delaray's Generals and read 'We are aware of your outrages When we catch you we shall shoot you and cut you up in pieces' The endorsement by Ross was 'Your name noted When I catch you I shall cut you up in pieces before shooting you'

After that Ross *was* caught A heavy monetary reward had been offered for his capture

From the helio station of Commando Nek one could see with the naked eye in that clear atmosphere for 20 miles

Early one morning it was reported to R that a solitary horseman was riding in on the plain below An hour or so later it became apparent from the swinging shaps, easy seat, ropes, *reims*, carbine carried under the right leg, and general outfit that our friend Ross had 'hit the trail'

With leisurely deliberation, and beautifully mounted, he arrived and asked for food, then he satisfied R's curiosity as to why he was alone His explanation was rendered more complicated by its casual brevity, but it amounted to this — He had been ambushed and captured while watering his horse He was searched, disarmed, trussed up and tied on to a Basuto pony, hands lashed behind his back, ankles bound beneath the girths, and a thong, or *reim*, passed through the pony's bridle and hitched to the saddle of each Boer riding beside him

The party of three then proceeded by stages, to report to General Delaray In this formation they continued for some hours, Ross always half a length behind the other two, until suddenly — he shot them both!

He had worked his hands loose and slipped them into his cross pockets where he had a little double-barrelled 0 22 Deringer pistol strapped on to the naked hollow of each thigh He fondled these two toys lovingly in Ronald's presence The barrels were not side by side but one above the other so that they lay quite flat The rest was apparently very simple, he finished them both off with a sheath knife, commandeered pipe and tobacco, saddled the best horse with the most attractive saddle, and duly arrived at Commando Nek

CHAPTER 9

1902

FOR MONTHS RONALD'S INDEPENDENT COMMAND ON THE MAGALIES-berg Mountains continued, and kept him busy. The precipitous formation of this mountain range, and its forbidding wildness, offered little encouragement to hostile approach, but at Zihkats Nek, a few miles towards Pretoria, the Boers had outmaneuvred a British post, and again at Nooitgedacht Nek, nearer to Rustenburg, they had given a very creditable imitation of Majuba.

For 15 miles a sangar was built about every eight hundred yards, so as to leave no intervening dead ground, and each of these was carefully masked by the surrounding scenery. These sangars were manned night and day. At every weak spot powerful abbatis were constructed and clearings cut in the bush to destroy shelter and to improve visibility for rifle fire. Mule tracks were devised by the least exposed and easiest gradients limited to one in seven. Emergency rations were buried and provision made for water supplies; it was estimated that this post could stand an intensive siege of twelve weeks, and finally constant night raids or patrols were made on the plains below, following a daylight reconnaissance, in order to split up any concerted attack.

On one of these expeditions when R and his Sergeant Murphy were out alone, the latter captured single-handed twenty-two Boers with their rifles and bandoliers. R had twice previously recommended Murphy for conspicuous gallantry, and now he did so a third time for the following example, which gained him the Distinguished Conduct Medal.

They rode out together after dark on the night in question to reconnoitre a Boer farm-house occupied by women whose menfolk had long since gone away on commando and had never returned. The story was circumstantial and suspect. Having examined the surrounding country towards Zoutpans Drift during most of the afternoon from an observation-post on their mountain-top, they expected to find nothing, and were only out upon one of their usual precautionary patrols, but they were both shod in soft

noiseless *veldskoene*, and after making a considerable detour R approached the homestead as though stalking a wild animal. They dismounted in the long grass of a kloof or glen, some two or three hundred yards away down wind, and R remained with the horses while Murphy disappeared into the darkness towards the farm.

Then came the first hint of unusual occupation, for although there was no sound, yet the indefinitely composite smell of a Boer farmstead, that mixed odour of smouldering cattle kraal dung and freshly roasted coffee, of milled grain, cured skins, tan and tallow, of 'stinkwood' furniture, charcoal and reed thatch, all came to him as pungently as usual, but to this pot-pourri was now added an almost positive contribution of strong Boer tobacco!

The first discovery made by Murphy was a bunch of horses off-saddled in the laager. If he had not been familiar with the plan of the house and outbuildings, he would have been nonplussed at this point. What he did however was both impudent and resourceful.

Divided by a broad central passage, two large rooms form the interior of such a homestead. Its principal feature is the stoep, the wide verandah, running the full length of both rooms between which lies the central passage. It was clear therefore that everyone within would be either in the one room or the other, so Murphy stalked the house, negotiated the passage, and reaching the door of the only inhabited room flung it open and presented himself supported by two o 45 service revolvers.

With calm assurance he explained that the house was surrounded and directed everyone to hold up his hands. There were twenty-two men and six women, all the rifles were stacked in corners or against the wall, and most of the bandoliers had been discarded. Murphy marshalled his audience into one end of the room. Ordering a young girl to shift the table and items of furniture out of the way he made them all lie close together face downwards on the floor with arms still outstretched. He then directed the girl to sling one rifle and one bandolier on to the back of each recumbent Boer.

By this time R had got wind of the situation and arrived with the two horses. It was an easy matter to pass each individual Boer down the passage from the protection of Murphy to that of R outside where they once more lay face downwards in two rows. When all their horses had been saddled and mounted the whole

RONALD ON THE MAGALIESBERG MOUNTAINS, 1901



company, excluding the women, was brought into Commando Nek and eventually handed over as prisoners of war, equipped with horses, rifles and bandoliers, to District Headquarters at Rietfontein

Meanwhile General Sir John French had made a spectacular march with his Cavalry Division over mountainous country, including a pass, known as the Devil's Elbow, fit only for goats, and had reached Barberton, where R was now ordered to rejoin his Regiment. This welcome news was received by helio from the adjutant of his unit at Rietfontein, who also informed him that the G O C District had reported in most complimentary terms upon the activities and excellence of the Commando Nek dispositions and had recommended that the Distinguished Service Order be conferred upon the officer in charge forthwith

R handed over his command to an officer of the Welch Regiment sent out to relieve him, and proceeded to Barberton. He was detailed for duty to Cape Town for the purpose of collecting Regimental baggage left there in store at the beginning of the war. On 23rd June he wrote from Cape Town — 'I left Barberton at 8 a m on Tuesday and reached here [Cape Town] at 10 a m yesterday [Sunday] having been "en train" for five days continuously! K of K arrives this morning and leaves for England at 3 p m in the "Oratava". Curiously enough the very man who relieved me on the Magaliesberg prior to my departure for Barberton is escorting him home with 120 men of the Welch Regiment. If I had not gone away it would have been me!' Ronald had met this officer that morning in Adderley Street wearing the ribbon of the D S O conferred upon the officer commanding the Commando Nek outpost on the Magaliesberg Mountains

The War was now apparently drawing to a close, so on his return to Barberton with the Regimental baggage, R put in for a week's leave to shoot in the Komati Poort district. He consulted a resident of Barberton, Mr Ernest Holgate by name, of Stein-aeker's Horse, whose local knowledge and influence had invested him with a kind of native Commissionership. From him R discovered that a difficult situation was pending, and would shortly necessitate an expedition by himself into Swaziland for the purpose of coming to terms with the Queen of the Amaswazis in respect of an issue of British rifles made early in the War for the

self-protection of the Swaziland Border against Boer intrusion. There was a genuine reluctance on the part of these savages to return the weapons.

This arming of natives, in Holgate's opinion, had been a profound mistake and would involve delicate negotiation, because the White Man's prestige was largely dependent upon the reputation of his rifle and this supremacy had been dangerously undermined. These considerations forged a powerful link, R thought, between himself and Holgate so, before starting on his brief shooting trip, he succeeded in convincing his new-found friend that the prospective mission would clearly benefit to no small extent if he, as a regular soldier, accompanied Holgate in the capacity of A D C. To this Holgate agreed and, promising to apply officially in the sense proposed, he provided all the requisite information and assistance so that R, greatly rejoicing, went off meanwhile on his own excursion.

When he returned, preparations for the journey to Swaziland were well advanced. Holgate had announced his intended visit to the Queen by native runner.¹ Ponies, rations and the limited necessary equipment were ready. R weighed just nine stone, and Holgate slightly more, but those sure-footed little Basuto ponies must have carried well over thirteen stone with saddle, bridle and blankets, rifle, fifty rounds of ammunition, field-glasses, water-bottle, cavalry-cloak, presents—mostly ropes of tobacco, beads, American cloth and the inevitable poncho—1 e goods for barter.

Thus encumbered like a Christmas-tree, R says, he rode out behind Holgate an hour before sunrise at a trapple, that curious gait combining a walk and a canter. Towards the middle of the morning they came to a mountainous country where the going was tedious and slow. From then onwards the panorama became increasingly magnificent and the travelling proportionately hazardous and difficult. At times the absence of foothold seemed to baffle even their catlike native ponies, and as they were climbing for the most part, R resolutely forbore to look back and contemplate the prospect for their return. But Holgate understood his job thoroughly. He knew the country, he was an ornithologist and a naturalist. They tramped over clumps of moraesas and stumbled

¹ Umandini, her predecessor, the better-known and bibulous old King of Swaziland, had died of dipsomania and corpulence in December, 1889.

into tangled low-growing tufts of spek-boom They were scolded all the way by green shrikes and francolins, they were followed by birds of golden, scarlet and green plumage, they were assailed continuously by vultures circling around with slow ominous assurance And Holgate watched the birds, the vegetation, the geological formation, and led forward without concern or hesitation, until on the third day they were met by the Queen in full state

The spot chosen by her to await their coming was entirely unsuited to ceremonial A rushing torrent swept down a rocky bluff, crossed the narrow passage, angrily caressed the intruding boulders, and hurled itself down a precipice to the depths below Holgate, who was struggling forward and upward leading his pony, came suddenly upon her round a bend and, prostrating himself immediately, he struck the ground three times with his forehead R in his turn did likewise

She was seated in a huge barbaric reproduction of a Sedan chair, carried in shifts, like a Machila, by sixteen enormous savages, and draped with a kind of toga of skins which enhanced her presence She must have weighed at least twenty stone, for bulk was synonymous with physical perfection in popular esteem She was said to be eighteen years old but might equally have passed for double that age She was completely naked but for a skilfully worked little apron of beads supported permanently by a beautiful wide roll of projecting flesh and apparently superfluously attached by a narrow beaded belt encircling her Massive copper and gold bangles encased her arms and legs, while fringes of buffalo tail hung from her shoulders, elbows, knees and ankles, thus discouraging an amorous host of winged insects from swarming upon her body A panache of crane feathers bobbing above her head was kept in place by a mixture of cement-hardened mud, and, laid between the generous folds of her enormous neck, she displayed a necklace of lion claws

She sat in state upon her portable throne She was gracious but not dignified Her disconsolate breasts hung stretched and limp like great Victorian drop earrings, her magnificent pendulous paunch sagged like a tidal wave between her knees She was dazzling to the beholder because of the sunlight playing upon her shining undulations, but, susceptible as he was, R found the human aroma disconcerting Immediately behind her stood the

principal Minister over whose head was held the insignia of his office, a multicoloured umbrella, reminiscent of a European bathing-beach, upon a long spear-shaft. Behind him again were grouped other Court Officials with an endless throng of armed warriors in the rear comprising the Royal Impi. It was noticeable, however, that there were no ladies-in-waiting.

A delicate point of etiquette now arose due to bad Staff work by the Lord Chamberlain's Department which happily passed undetected, otherwise that official would have been thrown to the vultures. It was customary for the Queen to be preceded by her entire escort when on the march, but on this narrow ledge it was neither possible to turn her palanquin nor to debouch beyond it, so, after much shouting and capering, an ingenious compromise was reached. The mighty following which extended out of sight was turned about, and the Queen was carried backwards. So she progressed according to protocol at the tail of her procession while Holgate and R. were still in front of her. This formation was perforce maintained for several hundred yards until the defile opened into space and the order of marshalling could be adjusted.

The meeting with the Queen had one reassuring effect, for the weight of her presence suggested to Ronald that they were nearing their destination, and almost at once, as it seemed, they approached a vast plateau, and the great Kraal of hundreds upon hundreds of native huts came into view surrounding an open space like an Indian Maidan.

Preliminary negotiations commenced at once with the customary interchange of presents and amenities none too appetising in either case to a European palate, but Holgate was experienced and, as pow-wows of this nature are tactically centred around the loss or gain of time, he made his introductory *démâches* while R. looked after the ponies and equipment.

Thus several hours were employed until the feasting and dancing inseparable from a great Indaba could be restrained no longer. The Queen surrounded by her advisers and officials still sat on her portable throne, with a large kaross spread in front of her smelling of mutton fat but constructed of leopard skins and sewn together with raw-hide thongs. At each corner sat Holgate and R., while women squatted in a semi-circle on each flank. They chanted monotonously and clapped their hands to the dancing of

the warriors who stamped in pairs, in squads and by Regiments They chanted of their exploits, giving a dramatic rendering the while which gradually incited both them and their audience to frenzy The women became obsessed, they swayed and beat their thighs with unrestrained vehemence, and at this point when the last remnants of self-possession had completely vanished, the Master of Ceremonies cleared the ground and led forward selected champions for a contest in spear throwing, with the Queen herself as target'

The situation seemed truly desperate, everyone was greatly influenced by millet beer and the lust for battle There must have been two or three thousand armed savages urged on by irresponsible females to unleash their vigour The chosen exponents were ranged together at a distance of perhaps two hundred yards, and commenced at once to display their boastful antics and to proclaim in song their individual valour

One by one they leapt fantastically, danced, threatened and, bounding up to the starting-point, hurled their long broad-bladed spears with terrific effect, while the remaining competitors jeered and ridiculed each attempt, only to fall short of it, perhaps, themselves Every throw called forth howls of derision and exhortations to greater effort But there was one giant who laughed, yelled and qualified in every respect for lunacy until his own turn was heralded by the entire community This was the Chief of the Queen's Body Guard Having made a magnificent entry he now had the stage to himself Twice he leapt high into the air like a springbok, and with swift enormous bounds approached the crease to measure his aim Then, arresting the pulse of the multitude with a yell of triumph, he repeated the motions He crouched with the subtle agility of a panther, bounded about 20 feet and slipped his heavy spear

With such power was it impelled that it seemed at first to shiver and feel about like a homing pigeon before settling to its flight Reaching the height of its trajectory it appeared to hesitate, then gracefully to lower its blade as though making obeisance, and with renewed deliberation flew on towards the mark The alignment was exact It could scarcely fall short of the Queen nor pass beyond her For the breathless fraction of a second the blade could be heard biting into the soil only a few feet in front of the leopard-

skin kaross, and as its shaft quivered almost indelately, the tumult of stamping and delirium gave evidence of spontaneous acclamation, for it was indeed a superb performance

During this display Holgate with histrionic eloquence had continuously assured R. that excepting by miraculous intervention no rifle (in Kaffir hands) could emulate such marksmanship and, in response to his prompting, R. had played his counterpart with unmistakable wonder until this pantomime approached the danger zone between burlesque and prudence Yet Holgate translated their mutual amazement with exaggerated emphasis, but convincing accuracy, and a slow grin spread over the Queen's face, signifying her satisfaction

By sunrise the following morning all semblance of restraint had disappeared A non-stop orgy during the whole night had kept revelry alive and completely disposed of rest There were neither local police to maintain order nor closing restrictions to encourage it, and Holgate was deliberately fostering this lapse of propriety to serve his own ends The methods and the insidious flattery which he used to bring about his results are less important than the fact that while maintaining a studied reserve and commanding a most dignified respect he was lavish in his praise and very much *persona grata* The wilder the exuberance and the demonstration in his honour the more he complimented the Queen, until she and her Ministers were clearly becoming hypnotised by the trend of events

Reflecting afterwards, however, upon the hazards of that day, R. realised that Holgate was growing more serious and even apprehensive 'We must force a conclusion,' he said, 'and leave tomorrow' The quality of entertainment had changed appreciably, the tempo was quickening Inter-Regimental war dances were introduced and the playground of Gymkhana became a Tournament arena Presently sham fights were staged following upon the war dances, and Holgate redoubled his attentions to the Queen

I find no mention of the concessions he offered in exchange for the conditions which he sought to impose, but at this stage in R.'s journal there appears a detailed description of what he calls the comic and the macabre The picture is rather too extreme for slow-motion rendering Holgate was excelling himself in a language which he knew and understood perfectly, and which lent

itself to metaphor and sententious usage. He was in the middle of a lengthy declamation describing how he, the unworthy ambassador of his own great white race, had extended to her one by one the most fragrant blossoms culled from her productive land, he described their shape and colour with the facility of a poet, but he deplored the dexterity with which she had extracted the honey from each, while rejecting from him the bloom itself. It was thus that he referred to his own persistent arguments and reasoning, until turning to R he said in English with obvious meaning, but with the same tone of intensity

‘They say the lion and the lizard keep
The Courts where Jamshyd glорied and drank deep’

Then he deliberately continued to weave the warp and the woof of his assault upon her feminine frailty, he completed his picture and likened her to a fertile butterfly! M’Zürüveilie (butterfly!) The effect was immediate. That was the mystic word for which he had been groping, it was obviously and convincingly the *mot juste*. And with savage exultation the grim warriors, unmindful now of the exalted personages watching them, stamped, attacked and counter-attacked, whistled and hissed as they charged and rebounded with a terrific crash from the six-foot zebra hide opposing shields, sank here and there to the ground with a sickening thud and were dragged away by the ring stewards with no more ceremony or movement than the victims of a bullfight in Spain.

‘How realistic it all seems,’ said R. ‘It actually looks as if those spears go through them like butter.’

‘They do,’ replied Holgate laconically, ‘that is why we must get away at once’

CHAPTER IO

1902

THE QUEEN HAD VOUCHSAFED A PRONOUNCEMENT, SHE HAD GIVEN a promise and the word of a Zulu was still as binding as the word of an Englishman had been in the days of 'John Company' or the Indian Mutiny They accordingly terminated their State visit and made a getaway with regal and embarrassing honours, but R questioned Holgate closely about this Had not Lobengula been required to sign, or make his mark upon a document at Bulawayo? Did not Francis R. Thompson risk his life to negotiate that deal in order to secure concessions for Rhodes?

'Certainly,' said Holgate, 'but no such mark would have been exacted by a white man understanding the Zulu character, and least of all by Thompson, had it not been for European politics That document was essential as evidence against German aggression and competition, rather than as an instrument implementing a Matabele undertaking Don't forget,' he added, 'that Cecil Rhodes was intriguing with the Colonial Office at home, and the Colonial Office was intriguing with Rhodes, each was playing off Germany against the other' (and after recording this conversation R notes 'Ergo, Talleyrand was right, a signed document, in his view, was a cloak for the time being, but when the wind changed it became a burden')

As they travelled northward back to Barberton over the difficult and mountainous tracks, Holgate sketched out the history of his adopted country with a wealth of anecdote He was an Englishman and a great Imperialist with the courage, tenacity and sense of justice of his prototype the early pioneer He regarded the Boer War, then drawing to its close, as the most humiliating that England had ever waged It had taken three years, he said, for half a million British soldiers to subdue a Boer population of less than half a million, and had produced nothing which could not have been gained for the asking if President Kruger had never seen Rhodes In amplification of this, he said it was fatuous to suppose that an ignorant illiterate old man who could not be persuaded to

believe that the world was round (although the fact was recognised by one Eratosthenes who died 250 B.C.), and whose experience was based solely upon the Bible and persecution, would remain adamant to the gentle touch of a strong man. But this, said Holgate, was a very rare combination either in an individual or an administration, and in any case completely foreign to the make-up of Cecil Rhodes.

He preferred the old-time pirates like Drake, Raleigh, Frobisher, Hawkins and Clive — he mentioned them all — who laid no claim to subterfuge but were at least Squires of Dames and Knights of the Road, like Claud Duval, as opposed to smug Ministers in Whitehall, and plausible envoys like Rhodes, honest enough individually perhaps, but utterly unscrupulous in the collective exercise of their public policy, professing exemplary virtue but practising none, and puritanically believing themselves above and beyond suspicion.

R wrote down all this at the time in somewhat disconnected fragments, but he recalls a certain similarity to the views expressed by Maurice Gifford and attributed to Jameson, and he concludes with these words ‘The name of Ernest Holgate will probably not appear in any despatch and will therefore remain quite unknown in the archives of the War Office or the Colonial Office. Possibly it will never get beyond the Commandant of Barberton! And yet I have no doubt whatever that, although he came away without a single token or sign, every one of those rifles will be satisfactorily accounted for’ and at a later date this reflection was in fact confirmed to the letter.

Thus talking Ronald and Holgate travelled to the edge of the hills. They had just opened up Barberton far away in the distance, 20 miles perhaps, on the plain beyond. It was about the spot where R had refrained from looking back, on the outward trip, at the horrible descent which would confront them on the return. A narrow game track circled a spur of the rocky mountain and, in places, actually overhung an almost sheer drop to the gorge below. The foothold was treacherous because of loose stones on a surface which torrents and periodical landslips had undermined, but the vegetation and thin jungle which clothed the mountain side, softened the picture and robbed it of its more alarming prospect. At difficult places like this each man followed his own horse.

and at the moment when the accident happened R was at the tail of the single file

Suddenly he saw his pony overreach and its near hind quarters slip over the edge. In trying to recover it was left literally hanging by its forehand, and Holgate had already grabbed the headstall and was struggling to reach the breastplate. His right leg was fully extended and his left knee doubled up under his chest. The pony found a purchase, plunged, lost its balance, and fell with its full weight on Holgate's knee. There was a crack like a pistol shot. Holgate fell backwards on to the track, the pony scrambled over him, and R found the left foot telescoped to the knee with several inches of bone protruding beneath it. Instantly he propped Holgate against a rock and, taking a purchase off his pelvis, pulled out the foot and then set the fractured ends together. They were perfectly in place before Holgate had recovered from the shock, and he held them himself, while R arranged a waterbottle to support the knee, padded him into position, and knee-haltered the ponies. Then they both got to work quite mechanically.

Fortunately every soldier in the Boer War received an issue of a small first-aid waterproof silk package to be sewn into the lining of his jacket and, in addition, R always carried on his lanyard a small cylindrical anti-snakebite gadget containing a tiny scalpel and tablets of permanganate of potash. He was therefore provided with bandages, swabs, disinfectant and, of all blessings, a perfect pair of improvised surgical splints, from the Argentine saddle he was using.

That was why Holgate's historical discourse was abruptly cut off by a precarious game track too narrow to allow freedom with a wounded man, too steep for normal movement by man or horse, and separated by 20 miles at least from any hope of assistance. It was also because of the sequel to his unfinished tale that in describing Holgate, I used the words courage and tenacity.

Ronald is a fatalist because his predicaments are invariably accompanied by truly Providential concessions which place them beyond the realm of mere accident. Had the present misfortune occurred later in the day, or farther afield, it would have involved delay and another night in the open, the nights being bitterly cold. In the circumstances, however, there seemed reasonable hope of making Barberton that day, so although nearly two hours had

passed before they fixed the leg to their mutual satisfaction (for Holgate was quite detached about it), R took the ponies down, hobbled them on better manœuvring ground, and began to work in a hurry

He cut two long spruce poles, stripped off the bark into convenient lengths for lashings (a common usage by native carriers and porters), cut two light cross-bars, and thus had a framework ready for the blankets which would complete his horse-litter. This he fitted fore and aft to each pony, the poles resting in the stirrup leathers reinforced yoke-fashion, in case of breaking a leather, by both breastplates, which could now be dispensed with in the absence of any more climbing. Replacing the whole contrivance on the ground and leaving the ponies, he then went to fetch Holgate.

It would have been possible but dangerous, they thought, to carry him, so R had selected and cut a forked branch which, used like an inverted plough, would work as a sledge. Clearing the path of obstacles on the way he dragged this up, and made it as resilient as possible with grass and scrub. Holgate was then placed upon it so that his leg could be cradled and slung between his own neck and Ronald's to minimise jolts. This contraption was successfully dragged step by step down to the ponies, and the rest was only a matter of arrangement for the maximum of comfort and the minimum of risk.

Less than six hours later the leg was under examination in Barberton Hospital, but so satisfactory had been the journey, and the manipulation, that no corrective breaking down was necessary, and the fracture was treated as originally set.

★

Peace was signed at Vereeniging on the 31st of May 1902, the Boer War came to an end and the 6th D G's were amongst those Regiments ordered to India. Ronald rejoined at Newcastle and found them under canvas in the shadow of Amajuba. The weather was still bitterly cold at night and the luxury of living in tents was like the balm of hot water, but the enforced idleness, after intensive campaigning for so long, became an irksome problem for all ranks alike. There were no parades other than stables, and after Mess at night the officers sat playing bridge in the open, seated on empty

biscuit-boxes, muffled up in 'British Warms' and karosses, each with a tin mug of whisky by his side, and all for protection against insomnia and cold. For their additional comfort a remarkable instrument had been sent from England which produced encouraging music. It was a phonograph, the prototype of a gramophone, and the first one any of them had seen or heard. 'The Honeysuckle and the Bee' continued late into the night, and as the trumpeter called them out for stables at 5 a.m. Ronald has never played bridge since. It was a wearisome business and lasted until August, when they embarked at Port Natal for Madras.

But R occupied much of his time in writing home sundry impressions of a tiresome war which cost us nearly six thousand killed and over twenty-two thousand wounded, as against over 800,000 killed and two million wounded in the Great War, and which at that time seemed to have produced very little more to be proud of than the first Boer War — although the Dutch Boer's faith, '*als zal recht komen*,' has, since then, been amply realised!

His letters were prolific. They describe how in the best hospitals the legs of the beds stood in jam-jars for protection against insects, how the devastation of enteric fever was increased by the impossibility of boiling water before consumption owing to the absence of fire fuel, how alum was used when procurable, but how water was invariably strained through a dirty handkerchief or rag to catch putrifying particles of dead horse or cattle flesh without however netting the shrimp-like animalculæ, the physical pain of thirst and heat when a man's mouth fails to function and his eyes swell up and close, the accompanying dirt and veld sores, the torture of four hours' sleep out of twenty-four, continuously, and on short rations, the terrific variations of temperature, dropping thirty degrees on the Drakensburg Mountains, for instance, the contrast between the use of a spine-pad against sunstroke by day and a cavalry cloak, frozen stiff, against frostbite by night.

He remarked upon the faithful shirt which remained with him always because there was no other and because finally it could no longer stand the strain of being removed. There were lice and other vermin which thrived on his body by day and drew warmth from it by night. There were torrential rains so dense that visibility through the Victoria Falls bore comparison, and hail stones,

or alternatively a swarm of locusts, which swept the country clean and devastated man or beast like withering rifle-fire. There was the intense discomfort of bivouacking at night wrapped in sodden blankets and buckled into a canvas valise in six inches of muddy water, and the scorching wind blowing like a furnace and capable of dislodging and throwing a thirty-foot railway line clean away from the track.

A comparison was made between the British Subaltern's pay of 4s 3d per day — since this was known as a Subaltern's War — while a Kaffir received 3s, a 'Native Conductor' £1 per week (by orders from Whitehall) — when his previous remuneration had been a pot of jam per week and a time-expired pair of trousers per month — and the value of £5 placed upon every Boer prisoner, whether dead or alive.

All these things were described in detail, but they dealt only with campaigning in a country which at other times Ronald eulogises and loves.

The transport ship *Ionian* sailed from Port Natal on August 16th with 'G' Battery R H A, the 6th D Gs, the 1st Essex Regiment, and details of the R A M C, Indian Medical Service and R G A. They were due to arrive at Madras on August 31st and all these units were to be stationed at Bangalore. It was a happy ship with the exception of one personal grief for Ronald. He was parted from Nellie.

The reason for this wrench was that dogs were not allowed to land in India. Ronald was checked, on parole as it were. But the ponies, saddlery and grooms were being shipped independently by another vessel, and Brown, his groom, was a man of proved initiative and resource.

'Will you give her to me, Sir?' he asked, and Ronald bequeathed her to him.

'Good bye, Brown,' he remarked. 'If ever I see you and her again, you must promise to sell her to me for £10.' And it was left like that.

The *Ionian* sailed away, leaving everything behind that Ronald cherished most in that part of the world, but he had an unaccountable feeling of finality which, in spite of Brown's optimism, seemed to be reflected in the pathetic little face as he looked into it for the last time.

By some inexplicable misfortune, or dereliction of Staff work, the ponies, saddlery and baggage were misappropriated, absorbed, lost or stolen. The second ship sailed after them, bringing only the remaining men, and Ronald never saw his faithful little dog again.

CHAPTER II

1903-1910

THE ERSTWHILE OSTENTATION OF A CAVALRY REGIMENT IN peace time was on the wane. Its *étagage* was doomed, and would disappear into limbo very soon with the time-expired remains of brilliant equipment. Already shabricks and sabretaches had gone, stable-jackets and shoulder-chains followed, the beautiful old Mess kit was succeeded by its universal counterpart, and this painful process of disfigurement has continued until nowadays a mechanised unit parades in the name of its glittering forbear. But these phenomena were scarcely recognisable when the 6th D G's arrived at Bangalore to find as fine a lot of remounts awaiting them as ever landed in India out of New South Wales, or anywhere else.

Every horse and every man, from the Commanding Officer downwards, went through riding-school again, so that some months later the regiment bore no resemblance whatever to a dishevelled mob, and its recently uncouth leaders had become transformed into Carpet Knights of a sartorial excellence beyond belief.

Cantonment life in India made a minor appeal to Ronald however, for while 'the becushioned luxury' was very seductive — as he wrote in a letter to his mother — 'the evanescent niceties of social infusion' proved somewhat overwhelming.

With a brother officer known colloquially as 'Little Chop' he proceeded to acquire Hindustani under a munshi. They both passed the lower standard, at which stage Ronald forsook his colleague (who advanced to higher proficiency) in favour of a six months' transport course which, being in India, offered the most comprehensive training of its kind, and qualified him for these duties anywhere in the world. Then he applied through his Commanding Officer to be seconded to the Field Force under orders for active service in Somaliland.

Meanwhile the daily torpor-killing curriculum of life ran its course. Ronald had established himself in a very attractive bungalow once occupied by the Duke of Wellington when Arthur

Wellesley, and more recently vacated by Winston Churchill when in the 4th Hussars He spent much of his time gardening in the spacious compound, or schooling ponies over a miniature course of jumps For the rest he devoted considerable attention to reading comparative religions (Upon which subject there is at least a volume of closely reasoned and minutely written letters addressed to his fiancée, Violet Goldingham, who presumably recognised them in those days as satisfactory tokens of ardent esteem)

The origin of this particular departure was twofold Firstly, he had discovered, in a deserted Boer farmhouse, an excellent volume of *Josephus* which was carried about on his saddle for days, and finally found a place in his scanty kit Secondly, an immediate friendship in Bangalore between himself and Colonel Forman, the principal Medical Officer and second in seniority to General Sir James Wolfe-Murray, brought about two visits to Adiar where from the library of Colonel Olcott, head of the Theosophical Society in India at that time, he found an exceptional choice of literature

This same Colonel Olcott provided a strangely contrasting interest to the routine life of Bangalore He had been Quartermaster-General of the American Army, and a man of considerable wealth But forsaking all his worldly ties, he became a disciple of Esoteric Buddhism, and a follower of Madame Blavatski, the famous teacher of Theosophy He believed absolutely in her occult powers, but confessed to her weakness in frequently abusing them He himself was a man of such compelling nobility, that even so unyielding a Scot as Colonel Forman accepted his statements without question, although still unwilling to adopt his more Spiritual convictions

The death of Madame Blavatski had left her distinguished follower alone, but not bereft of a leader For Colonel Olcott's philosophy and cult were based upon the existence of Kāma, the reincarnation of souls, and the spark of the Divine in man Each individual therefore worked out his own salvation, and reappeared accordingly in his next life with a profit and loss account

On this conception Colonel Olcott held that the great Mahatmas known to civilisation including Krishna, Confucius, Mahomet, Christus, Buddha, and others, were merely normal persons who had nevertheless excelled beyond all other men, that period-

ically in the world's history there appeared some such paramount Leader, and that the present epoch had produced Kūthumier, the Great Master from whom he, Olcott, took his orders

So uncompromising a thesis, of course, brought Colonel Forman into action with a battery of questions He wanted tangible evidence And Colonel Olcott continued his dissertation Presently he took a fresh quire of foolscap from a drawer, and asked Colonel Forman to extract a sheet This he placed before him on a blotting-pad and laid his open hand upon it while he spoke, remarking that by this means he might perhaps produce a 'precipitated photograph' of Kūthumier

When reversed, the sheet bore the clear impression of a head approximately half life-size, the head of a high-cast Thibetan in the prime of life, and with a distinction of countenance quite beyond human likeness In execution the image resembled a very careful rubbing, combined with a detailed mezzotint, and from a portrait thus produced, said Colonel Olcott, two oil paintings had been achieved by a young Dutch artist They were hung on the eye level in a long distempered passage, and immediately below a strong top light The same head appeared in slightly differing positions, but so extraordinary was the chiaroscuro that in this perfect light, and at a distance of only four feet, the spectator could not be certain whether he was confronted in each case by a living head, or by a painted canvas

Endorsed, as these examples were, by the calm dignity of Olcott, Colonel Forman nevertheless insisted that some more concrete link with Kūthumier seemed desirable And then Olcott explained that he had made that same observation when Kūthumier materialised in his cabin, during a recent voyage from the U S A to Madras Kūthumier had thereupon removed his turban and torn off the end, which he left with Olcott And Olcott now produced it

Among the many journeyings which his mother had contrived for Ronald's early education, was a pilgrimage to Trèves to see the Holy Coat If this Coat was not the one actually worn by Christ, as is claimed, it was admittedly of contemporary date, and is exhibited only periodically So the opportunity was exceptional

Some eighty thousand people queued up, and were marshalled past it each day It was under glass, but the right-hand lower

corner remained exposed, so that in very special cases it might be touched. The little provincial town was swamped by the flood of human visitors to its shrine. The cobbled market-place was carpeted by trusses of straw for sale, as sleeping accommodation, at eight francs per bundle. Every doorway or step was rented and eagerly bespoken, while dense crowds waited throughout the night far beyond the town.

The texture, colour, and fabric of the Holy Coat made a lasting impression upon Ronald, which revived with startling reality when he saw the fragment of Kūthumier's turban. It was the colour of unbleached linen, but yellow with age. It was woven diagonally in chevrons, a Syrian design of the time of Christ, and quite common by the fourth century, the material resembled the Holy Coat of Treves, and the Holy Shroud of Turin. But, still more curious, there was a beautifully worked miniature inscription at the untorn end, in the same style and in the same coloured threads as the embroidered ends of the *Saint Suaire*, or Holy Cloth, of Cadouin in Dordogne, which are believed to have been worked by the Virgin Mary herself.

These three examples have an unbroken record since their disappearance from Constantinople, in the early twelfth century after the Crusades. And the relic of Kūthumier's turban resembled them all.

Colonel Forman, the sceptic, was convinced by at least one fact, namely, that Colonel Olcott was incapable of equivocation.

At Bangalore the recognised routine of polo, racing, gymkhana, and theatricals in the Cavalry Barracks theatre continued, but Ronald was barred from polo, because of his maimed arm, and very soon reverted almost exclusively to the racing plate. He set himself to win the Subaltern's Cup, and bought from Black Hawkins of the 4th Hussars a little bay waler mare named Flight, one of the finest steeplechasers in India, and a perfect picture. Flight was immediately put into training, and the result was never in doubt. But when the great day came, the Sowkars, or native money-merchant bankers, secured their pursestrings by surreptitiously cutting Flight's girths, so that when she was out in the country, and jumping particularly big at a 'Becher's Brook,' the saddle and Ronald volplaned together underneath the rails. He narrowly escaped breaking his neck, while Flight completed the

course without a mistake and cantered in alone past the post, eighteen lengths ahead of the winner

After that a sporting brother-subaltern, Anketell-Jones, challenged him to race over the same course, and ordered out from Ireland a little chaser for the purpose, named Lady Abbess. Both mares were trained to perfection, and in due course at a spectacular meeting the race was run. This time provision was made against any irregularity, for Flight was an easy favourite as usual. She was guarded like a Cabinet Minister and of course won at even weights, with everything in hand. On the second day of the meeting she won the open steeplechase carrying 12 stone 8 (Ronald rode 8 stone 6) and led her stablemate China II all the way, Ronald's colours coming in first and second.

On this occasion her jockey excelled himself, he was using a 5-lb Australian saddle with the leather reversed and faced with the rough instead of the smooth side. In addition to this, and because Flight was by no means easy to sit, he took special precautions to remain 'put' in the hope of also leading his second entry into a place. He rosined himself very thoroughly! The result was that on arrival in the paddock and when ordered by the Stewards into the weighing-room, he found it impossible to dismount, so after unbuckling the girths, he proceeded crab-wise with saddle still *in situ*. Subsequently he skinned off his breeches with the glued-on saddle still attached.

But there was a less ambulatory side to this picture. Ronald had been in hospital with appendicitis, an intermittent ailment contracted in South Africa. The P.M.O., Colonel Forman, had been particularly kind to him, and thoroughly understood the problem of keeping him in training, and the desirability of patching him up to ride at this particular meeting. The day arrived, Colonel Forman was both dubious and anxious. He allowed Ronald to ride, but brought him back in person immediately afterwards in the hospital ambulance.

A little later, Colonel Forman pronounced in favour of an operation, but was reluctant to risk it in the hospital conditions prevailing at that time in India. The patient must be sent home.

And just then came the long-awaited approval of his application for Somaliland!

Arrangements were made for him to travel via Madras, by long

sea route the whole way He was to leave by the night train in order to avoid the heat Colonel Forman paid his customary visit to Hospital that evening, and Ronald said 'Good-bye'

'Not yet,' replied the P M O 'I shall see you at the station'

Later he watched his patient comfortably arranged in a special carriage 'Good-bye,' said Ronald

'Not yet,' repeated the P M O 'I am travelling with you to Madras'

On board ship Colonel Forman held consultation with the ship's doctor The ship's bell rang for the last time calling visitors ashore

'Good-bye,' said Ronald

'Not yet,' vouchsafed that devoted doctor man 'I am coming home with you, on leave'

They battled* through the Gulf of Aden in the middle of the monsoons and the worst of the heat, day and night throughout the whole voyage either the ship's doctor or Colonel Forman remained in Ronald's cabin They were prepared to operate at any moment, as they afterwards admitted, or to land him at Aden if necessary, but they made Tilbury by dint of good nursing and without misadventure Colonel Forman brought Ronald to London He spent thirty-six hours at the United Services Club and then sailed back to India by the same route He had put in three months' leave on a 'Call to Duty' as he expressed it, and he probably saved Ronald's life

The appendix was removed on the 22nd October, and the patient was allowed to sit up, out of bed, for the first time on Christmas Eve

Flight, a very remarkable little mare, remained Ronald's property in Bangalore for two years under the management of a brother officer, and continued her undefeated record She looked like a Derby winner, jumped like a stag, and was so nervous, until she reached the starting-post, that it took six syces to get her jockey into the saddle Once off, she was as tractable in hand as a modern high-powered car, and moved like a greyhound Ronald thought seriously of bringing her home to England, but it would have been a hazardous experiment, his own career was too uncertain, and her temperament too exacting, so he left her there, and devoted his attention to the patient Violet instead

He and Violet Goldingham had been tacitly engaged for six years, she nursed him through his long convalescence. He was now on half-pay, pensioned for wounds, and excluded for the time being from further military service. They were married in July, and betook themselves to an ancient manorial estate in Somerset dating from the twelfth century.

In the register of Manors held under the Abbot of Glastonbury there is reference to one Petrus de Ivitorna, who in the year 1189 '*fecit homagium et fidelitatem Idem tenet unam hidem in Ivitorna et apud Glastoniam tria hospicia per servitum unus militia*' (i.e., he did homage to the Abbot of Glastonbury for one hide at Ivythorne and three hospices in Glastonbury). But the present-day Manor house was restored later by John Selwood, Abbot of Glastonbury (1457-1493). His mitre and monogram cut in bas-relief on a large free-stone block appear over the heavy oak door inside the stone porch. On the dexter corbel of a wide mullioned window on the ground floor there is a shield bearing the arms of Marshall impaling those of Fitzjames, thus recording a marriage between those two families (11 Edward IV). On the sinister corbel of the same window are those of Marshall impaling Moor. The shepherd's house bears the shield of Percival of Western-in-Gordano with the initials I P dated 1578, and the large coach-house carries over its worked stone archway the arms of Waterhouse, OR a pile engrailed SA impaling ARG a bend wavy GU. But all these shields were carved long after the restoration of the house.

In thirty acres of parkland to the south-east of the house were five fish-ponds used formerly to swell the commissariat, and deeply sunk in the wood above was an underground ice house for storing the ice off these ponds. Among the early Manorial rights set out in the original Title Deeds was one, now lapsed by custom, which empowered the owner to keep thousands of pigeons for culinary use without let or hindrance from any one whose crops they might devour. For this purpose there still exists a huge columbarium of even greater antiquity than any of the other buildings, pigeon-holed to accommodate this enormous reserve, and with the unusual distinction of being square built.

Nestling under the south side of a wooded hill the domain had an unimpeded view across the vast expanse of drained, but otherwise undisturbed, moorland known as Sedgemoor. It was here

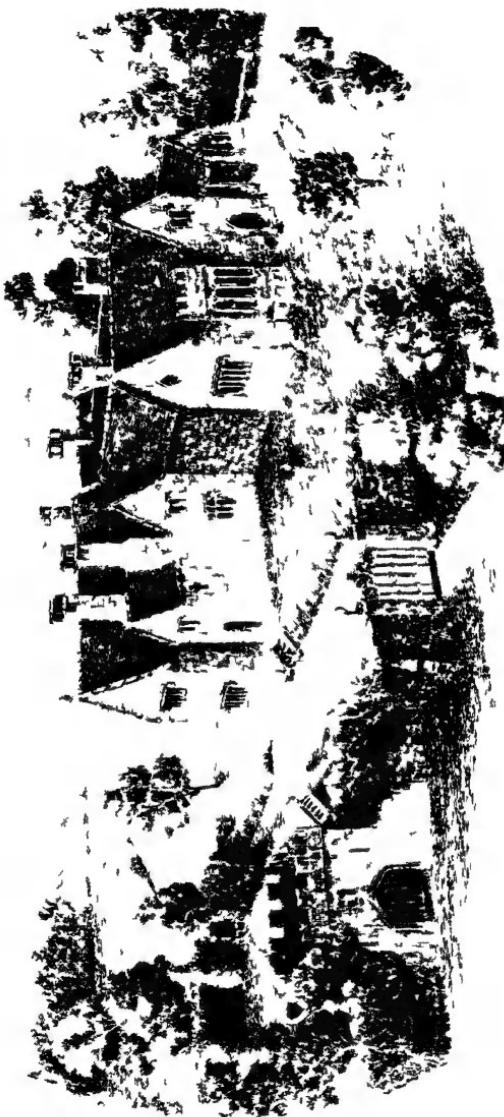
that one day in July 1685 a very young officer named John Churchill charged at the head of his troop in the Life Guards, thus ending the career of the Duke of Monmouth while commencing that of the Duke of Marlborough, the young officer in question And that same night three of the King's men came riding down the hill to capture a rebel refugee in the house They found him and murdered him, and their ghosts still ride jingling down the half mile of private road on the anniversary of that butchery Ronald has heard them, and so have others, but confirmation of the legend occurred in a curious and roundabout way

When King Edgar succeeded to the throne of England in A D 959 he became a staunch ally of Abbot Dunstan, was almost beatified and gave his name to many enrichments of Glastonbury Abbey, among them the addition of St Edgar's Chapel, built nearly six centuries later by Abbot Richard Beere as part of the reconstructed Abbey which grew intermittently from the year of its great fire, 1184, to the suppression of the Monastery in 1539, the latter being almost as destructive as the former

The existence of St Edgar's Chapel was then lost to memory, and even denied until in 1908, by the action of Bishop Kennion, Glastonbury Abbey was returned to the care of the Church and the nation after 370 years of alienation as a ruin, and 1,200 years after its founding, the Charter having been signed in 708

Frederick Bligh Bond as architect to, and on behalf of, the Somerset Archaeological Society, then began his explorations, and accepted Ronald's invitation to stay with him during the lengthy and frequent visits involved They were accordingly together very continuously and became increasingly intimate Bligh Bond was an adept at achieving results from automatic writing, and in collaboration with a friend of his from Bristol, J Allen Bartlett, a most interesting narrative about the French Revolution developed in serial form over a period of many weeks during the long winter evenings of 1908-9

Meanwhile Bligh Bond was engaged upon an architectural drawing showing the Abbey in its prime, four hundred years earlier He had already discovered the foundations of St Edgar's Chapel — which addition made Glastonbury Abbey the longest Abbey Church in England, nearly six hundred feet from east to



A VIGNETTE BY RONALD OF HIS OWN HOME

west But at this stage he found himself at fault in the absence of any certainty as to the actual height of the Chapel Ronald suggested automatic writing

Nothing daunted, Bligh Bond sat down casually with Mr Bartlett for a seance on the 27th of March, held a pencil in his hand and waited for Johannes, who had frequently communicated with them before by this means Johannes was a Benedictine monk of the time of Abbot Beere, a stonemason, who claimed to have worked on the construction of this very Chapel But being, as he said, only a humble and illiterate Monk, and expressing himself moreover in a kind of Gallic Latin *argot*, his style was apt to be obscure, though his measurements were exact Bligh Bond, however, was well versed in the dog Church Latin which in ecclesiastical usage has probably remained unchanged throughout the centuries, and bears no resemblance whatever to the classical language of Vergil, so he could elucidate these abstruse renderings with comparative ease

In due course Johannes announced himself and was invited to disclose 'The height of St Edgar's Chapel?' His reply was deliberate and to this effect — 'From the West wall measure fourteen feet, from the North wall twelve feet, at that point dig nine feet' This information drove Bligh Bond into a veritable fever of excitement He was determined to excavate forthwith, but Ronald said, 'No, not before we have forwarded these specific instructions to Everard Feilding, Secretary of the Society for Psychical Research, and have received his acknowledgment'

The next day brought a telegram announcing Everard Feilding's arrival, and on the 29th of March operations were commenced At the exact spot indicated, they recovered the head of a carved stone — a boss or apex stone — showing the intersection of twelve moulded ribs It was the keystone of the fan vaulting to the Chapel, and gave not only its height, but also every other measurement of the structure The stone lies there now among the important fragments preserved, and the particulars which led to its discovery were officially on record before any search was made

It was this experience with its astonishing *dénouement* which suggested the clairvoyance of old Johannes as a medium to solve the legend of the murdered rebel and the ghostly Cavaliers So

notwithstanding the probable lapse of a century or more between the death of Johannes and the Battle of Sedgemoor, they tentatively hoped for confirmation of the story

Once again, through the combination of Bartlett and Bligh Bond, Johannes conveyed compelling testimony. He indicated a particular spot which he called the 'rubbish heap,' and which presumably had once been so used, in the long avenue of ancient walnut trees, and there they disinterred a complete skeleton with a single spur of the period. Thus was the legendary tale corroborated by a 'humble and illiterate' Benedictine monk.

Meanwhile, deprived of his stable in Bangalore, Ronald now turned his attention from racing to team driving with small thoroughbred hackneys, and he had the invaluable support of a first-class stud-groom named Charles Marchant, an ex-Horse gunner from the famous 'Black Battery.'

He soon began appearing in the hackney and harness classes of horse shows with teams and tandems under sixteen hands. The strength and weight of a full-sized team proved too heavy for his left arm, so he drove 15 3 as wheelers and 15 1 in the lead, but the pace of these hackneys on the road proved a somewhat disturbing innovation to the patrons of the show ring, whose heavily shod horses were kept for the tan or grass.

Ronald shod his horses with steel racing plates on to which he screwed roadster or show-ring shoes as required. This technique justified itself immediately and afforded him the great advantage of driving his horses on the road. At Taunton, for example, he won his class and drove out through the Market Place at 6 p.m. with the same horses. At eight o'clock he was dressed for dinner in his own home twenty-three miles away. They travelled at seventeen miles an hour, but were well driven and powerfully reined back with bearing reins to throw the weight on to the quarters, preserve the forehand, and gain every inch in the stride.

Ronald did a great deal of work on the road and thereby kept his horses in the equivalent of hunting condition. When, therefore, after consultation with Lord Lonsdale, he presented a Challenge Cup to the Bath Horse Show (for competition by teams and tandems starting from Corsham Court, fourteen miles away, to finish in the ring under rules similar to those governing the Team

Marathon in the Royal Horse Show at Olympia) he won it himself!¹

The Bath Show was held so late in the season that harness classes suffered considerably as a rule, but this event attracted the well-known exhibitors, and kept them 'in commission'. In the tandem class, Nigel Colman entered the same pair as at Olympia with his professional whip, Mr Butcher, on the box. And Mr Butcher, a superb coachman, amply qualified to 'take 'em as they come,' but a publican in Bristol in between whiles, was also a friend of Ronald's, which recalls an earlier incident.

When showing at Olympia during a previous season, Butcher had been reprimanded by the Judges for serpentining the standing jumps in the ring long after being called in. He repeated the same evolutions a second time, thereby admittedly demonstrating both the perfect response to his 'points' and 'opposition,' or 'looping of the reins,' and the stern reality of the Judge's dictum, for Lord Lonsdale sent him out of the ring.

At Bath later in the same season Ronald was showing a very powerful pair of hackneys, shining like satin, bursting their metal, and proclaiming their corn. Mr Butcher quickly noticed that they were getting out of hand, and promptly tried to force him into the obstacles encumbering the ring, with the object of upsetting him, and if possible reversing the Judge's decision. Ronald's pair were now actually running away, but he just managed to head them and converged alarmingly with Butcher as they both swept out of the ring hub to hub. At the moment when they were almost locked together Butcher shouted, 'Why don't you learn to drive?' Immediately afterwards Ronald walked across and apologised to Butcher for nearly fouling him, but added, 'You know, Mr Butcher, if I could drive as well as you do, I should be turned out of the ring.' Butcher seized his hand and swore that next time he met Ronald in the ring he'd nurse him against all comers, and he kept his word. 'That,' says Ronald, 'is what in the world is called'

¹ Owing to the World War, the Bath Horse Show lapsed for some years, and this event disappeared altogether. The great challenge cup remained uncontested and unwanted, a relic of pre-mechanisation days. In 1925 it was suitably inscribed, and Ronald presented it as a mark of esteem to the Civil Service Sports Council as a permanent challenge cup for inter-departmental Tennis Championship (Men's doubles).

'diplomacy,' but by good coachmen with horse sense is termed 'giving the office' !'

Ever since the abortive attempt by Colonel Montenaro to include Ronald in his Old Calabar to Lake Chad expedition, the prospect of crossing the Western Sahara himself from Marrakech to Timbuctoo, or alternatively the possibility of reaching Lake Chad from the Sudan, had fascinated him. For two years he had pondered and worked in desultory fashion, devilling the subject with the help of the Curator and Librarian of the Royal Geographical Society.

Morocco had long been a hotbed of civil war and banditry, while the Great Powers quarrelled over control of the area. The French, however, having reached a settlement with the Spanish in the north, had now extended and strengthened their control from the west coast. Lyautey was in supreme command with M. de Saint Aulaire as his civilian deputy. By the spring of 1913, from his headquarters at Marrakech, Lyautey had coerced the local Kaids and tranquillised the country by suppressing a formidable rebellion directed against Taroudant.

It was this *affaire flambee* of the tribes which encouraged Ronald to complete his two-year-old plan for crossing the Western Sahara. Until 1913 either political or official difficulties had been sufficiently constant to delay his contemplated expedition — so meanwhile his researches in respect of Morocco were periodically pigeon-holed in favour of closer attention to more distant parts of Africa.

CHAPTER I 2

I 9 I I - I 9 I 3

ON THE 27TH OF MARCH 1911 AN ARTICLE APPEARED IN THE *Evening News* headed 'In search of a New Antelope' This was contributed by a native Commissioner who had come home from North of the Zambezi in order to prepare the plan of campaign for a prospective shooting trip, which two members of the Shikar Club, Lord Kingston and Ronald, were arranging for the following season The primary object was to obtain Black Lechwe, Red Congo Buffalo, and Situtunga, all 'very rare examples of the Antelope breed'

Lord Kingston was probably the finest rifle shot in the world at dangerous game He was the hero of an exploit in British East Africa which would never have come to light, had it not been watched through a long-distance spyglass, and related on the unimpeachable authority of that no less famous sportsman, Sir Robert Harvey

Lord Kingston had 'moved' a herd of buffalo in the extreme heat of the day, that is to say, by giving them his wind he had forced them to move at a time when all wild game remain stationary and resent disturbance Not satisfied with this intrusion, he followed them up, until resenting further interference, they stopped in a semicircular formation, and sullenly gazed at the foreign body Kingston had previously taken the second double-barrelled rifle from his gun-boy, and now sat down with his other heavy rifle across his knees to scan the whole herd through his glass for a shootable head

While he was thus occupied, the entire herd charged like a squadron of cavalry, and owing to their horseshoe alignment, they pressed towards the centre, making a solid mass Kingston had no warning except the sudden thunder of hoofs, but he sat still When they were apparently right on the top of him, he loosed off both barrels, and followed instantly with his remaining two Sir Robert Harvey from his distant high ground expected, when the dust subsided, to see a mangled corpse, but Kingston was still

seated as before, and immediately in front of him lay four buffaloes heaped together, while the remainder were scattered behind, content then to resume their interrupted immobility. He had shot a hole through the solid mass, sufficiently well-timed to provide his own escape.

Six months later (8th September) the two of them sailed in the *Dunvegan Castle* from Southampton, equipped for a substantial expedition in Central Africa. They had a battery of eight rifles, two shotguns, nearly three thousand rounds of ammunition, and countless bales of Indigo blue 'Americani' (butter muslin), worth less than a farthing, but representing sixpence per yard as local currency for the payment of native porters.

They travelled by the east coast route in order to visit the White Fathers of Zanzibar in the hope of obtaining from them a vocabulary of the Chinyanga language, having failed to find this from every other source, but the visit was equally unproductive.

They tried Mozambique, made famous within living memory as one of the world's greatest export and trading centres by Portuguese and Arab slave raiders, but without better result.

After Mozambique and Chinde, they disembarked at Beira on October 12th, and reached railhead on the 19th, nearly six weeks from the date of starting.

Before this, however, an enlightening passage in Ronald's diary describes an episode reflecting upon the birth and growth of education among the sons of Empire:

'Four very distinguished native Chiefs had been brought down to the coast by rail from Uganda for purposes of propaganda so that on their return they might exploit the gigantic greatness of British power. Never having seen any vessel larger than their own canoes, the programme included a visit on board an ocean-going liner, and our arrival here filled the bill. We are lying off Kilindini in the beautiful Mombassa harbour, so they were brought aboard in a launch. After the train this was perhaps uninspiring, but the size of the ship made amends (when they were convinced that she could really be propelled!). The engine room produced no reaction, and the electric light system was obviously regarded as a conjuring trick. They switched it on and off themselves and laughed merrily. Finally they were shown the refrigerator, and that was fantastic! They were each given a lump of ice with quite infectious results. They

played deck quoits with these lumps which were surreptitiously replaced as their bulk diminished. When they left each went ashore with cupped hand holding his trophy fully exposed to the glare of an Equatorial sun. They were determined to take these back to Uganda in order to demonstrate the astonishing *je ne sais quoi* of the Englishman. And I am told that the magic disappearance under their very eyes of the Englishman's gifts has done more to enhance his *prestige* than anything he could have done himself.

The voyage was without incident other than the fact that, the day before reaching Port Sudan, Ronald had changed places for meals with one Captain Tweedie, returning from leave to central Sudan, where he seldom saw a white man. The object of this exchange of seats was to give him the benefit, during his last few days on board, of the more convivial atmosphere at the Captain's end of the table. During lunch one of the twenty-foot wooden stanchions supporting the sun awning on deck broke, crashed on to the saloon skylight, and drove a large pane of half-inch glass down upon Ronald's head! He suffered nothing more than a moment of insensibility and a triangular gash which he carries to this day. There was enough consternation and blood, however, and staunchings with table napkins, to fill a boy's book of thrillers, for the weight and size of the glass was sufficient to decapitate him if he had been struck by a direct instead of a glancing blow. A very fortunate escape for Ronald, thanks to the exceptionally funny shape of his head, and for Captain Tweedie, who was probably spared a desert journey with a stitched-up scalp or worse.

The displeasure of these expeditions, it would seem, must provide a considerable set-off to their advantages. Here are quotations from Ronald's journal illustrative of native habits!

'Quite sure I shall have to stop here all day. The drunkenness of cannibals is upon them' (Incidentally they were cannibals of the Muschucolumbwe tribe) 'They suck it raw (Elephant flesh) while they hack with choppers. Absolutely revolting!' Two villages have transported themselves here in their entirety from great distances. C gave me an example of their disgusting meat lust. He came upon a lion on its own kill a week old, followed him, lost him, and returned to find his porters had demolished what the lion had left.'

Here are further examples of the amenities available in those days to sportsmen who could afford them

'Camped in a most wonderful spot, a swamp fifty yards away on one side, and the open sea of Lake Bangweolo same distance on the other. No cover, stalking as difficult as one could find anywhere. The grass varies from 2 to 5 feet, sometimes growing out of water, and at others out of dry sand. No other cover whatever, and no undulations. Result — apart from considerations of wind — if they (Lechwe) sense one above or through the grass, they are off, and only to be seen again half a mile away at the risk of exposing oneself. Conversely, by keeping out of sight, and working the wind, they are almost impossible to locate, and the tracks through grass growing in water are too constant to follow. Having obtained a shot, however, one sees only the head and part of the spine, one calculates the target, aiming accordingly, with at least six dozen sand flies sitting on one's face, while mosquitos and ants are crawling all over the non-submerged portions of one's body — Stalked five hours in this swamp.'

Such pastimes seem to be merely delectable interludes for the realisation of which people are ready to travel thousands of miles! Here is another extract

'At 3 o'clock temperature [his own] 101 3, at 6 15 temp 103 8 Matafwali [head gun-boy] went out to look for spoor but without result Two cups of coffee at 3 30 a m Cornflour and coffee at 6 a m Matafwali went out for spoor No result Have nothing left to eat 11 15 four bananas and coffee, cornflour and oatmeal run out — larder is pathetic! 6 p m one sausage and a cup of coffee Temperature 104, so must get on tomorrow Breakfast two sausages and three cups of coffee, very difficult to negotiate Feeling very bad Started off at 6 o — too late — stopped three times, but finding that each start was harder than the last, determined to carry on without stopping again, which I did at the rear instead of the head of my porters Arrived at Kapoli [a native village] 10 20 in a condition of which I feel ashamed This was the greatest effort I think that I have ever had to make — Sent scribbled note by runner to K [Lord Kingston was the nearest white man, and about 100 miles away] Temperature 105 Afraid I shall get no further Cannot stand up Cannot knock down the mercury in my thermo-

meter, dare not let the boys try, so, as long as my temperature goes up I can read it, but if it starts going down I shall not know what it is'

Ronald who is not without experience of big-game hunting, as an amateur, says that he has never had any close shaves, and insists that, while fact is stranger than fiction, the former has been amply dealt with and the latter is unworthy. Arising out of this trip, however, there were certain incidents which led to more than superficial results.

In 1913 the Royal Geographical Society held a special meeting on the 19th of May to commemorate the centenary of the birth of Livingstone. A most interesting lecture was delivered by Sir Harry Johnstone, who concluded his address with the statement that Livingstone 'died of exhaustion at Chitambo's village in the swamps near the South shore of Bangweolo on May 1st 1873.'

In view of the application with which Ronald had pursued his enquiries in the map section and library of the R G S on the subject of Marrakech and the Western Sahara he knew the curator well. After the lecture therefore he explained to him that the date given by Sir Harry Johnstone, namely the 1st May, appeared to be at variance with that on the metal tablet set into the stuccoed stone pyramid at Chitambo. The curator seemed perplexed and said he would consult certain photographs which they had. Ronald in turn expressed surprise, 'for,' said he, 'the scherm was erected under the supervision of a native conductor, no white men had been there since it was built and I certainly thought no other photographs than my own existed.'

It was arranged therefore that Ronald should bring his prints on the following Thursday, and meanwhile the curator would look up the others. These latter he produced at their next meeting, he was puzzled, he said, because he did not identify the figure shown standing at the foot of the monument, nor could he discover any record of their origin. Both the figure and the donor turned out to be Ronald himself! but the important point was that they are extremely sharp photographs and the inscription is quite clearly discernible 'Erected by his friends to the memory of Dr David Livingstone missionary and explorer who died here May 4th 1873.'

The discrepancy was subsequently explained as due to an error

by Livingstone himself, who had omitted to regularise his own diary in accordance with the Calendar requirements of Leap year

Another instance comes dangerously near the 'hairbreadth-escape' type of episode, but Ronald does not so consider it, and in any case the sequel is perhaps appreciable

When combing the country for elephant around Chembo in the Fort Rosebery direction he heard rumours of two man-eating lions doing considerable damage in the Serenge district To a man who of necessity pays a heavy tax for his elephant licence there is no particular attraction in devoting time and energy to the pursuit of lions which are classified as vermin When, however, these stories gained emphasis and were finally confirmed by reports from official sources that a British Royal Engineer officer at work on the Boundary Commission in that neighbourhood had been killed together with his 'capito' by these same vagrants, Ronald set off in pursuit

Having pitched his camp in good time one day, he went out with his two gun-boys, and was late returning in fact, it was already dark when striding through the bush in single file they heard the far distant sound of their porters in camp giving tongue At first they took this to be directional signalling to lead them home, but the noise increased with their approach and assumed quite a different significance They crashed along at even greater speed, and, on their arrival, found the camp in a state of panic and pandemonium Two of his boys had been stolen and devoured within hearing of the others It was now quite late and very dark, so Ronald immediately restored order and had all the native huts pulled down — these being merely freshly cut branches conically arranged with a covering of leaves — and rebuilt into a zareba about eight feet high, starting from the side of his own tent and forming a circular enclosure to finish at the opposite side, so that one end remained outside while the opening of his tent faced the huge fire lighted in the centre of the circle

Round this fire all the natives disposed themselves and Ronald, hoping for retribution by daylight, turned in with a rifle by his side expecting a quiet night since the 'enemy' was probably gorged Events however proved less reposeful The two lions were never more than a few yards away from the tent, their grunts and heavy breathing supplied a stern obbligato throughout the night to the



CHIAMBO, WHLRF LIVINGSIONE DILD

howls and yells of the natives, and one of them actually licked the canvas within a foot of Ronald's face! 'At that moment,' says his diary, 'I was so near being unnerved by the abject condition of my mob that I was only kept right by the thought of what Selous would have done in similar circumstances. I therefore did nothing.'

Just before dawn, however, he crawled out under the guy-ropes of his tent and waited for daylight until he could see to left and right. Lying thus flat on the ground, he located one almost at once, about thirty yards away, that being nearly the full distance of visibility through the bush. He whistled in order to turn it into a vulnerable position, and killed it outright with a shot in the mouth. The second one he killed a few minutes later with the same shot — the bottom teeth are knocked out of the one skull and the lower jaw of the second is smashed. His various diaries record eighteen instances of this identical shot at lions. Both these animals were in the prime, about eight years old with heavy black manes and in beautiful condition. Photographs of them were subsequently reproduced and described in 1927 in the Christmas number of *The Field*. So Ronald brought them home and offered the trophy to the Mess at Chatham in memory of their brother officer. There was however no very ready response, so many years later he presented them to the Alexandra Palace, where they now appear as one of the finest pair of black-maned lions ever shot.

The expedition developed into a long and exacting endurance test, profitable in its results, for it produced a first-class collection of specimen heads, including every variety obtainable in the game fields of Central Africa.

They shot in four countries during two calendar years, and were thus entitled by official permit to eight elephants each in North-Eastern Rhodesia, while in Portuguese and German East Africa the permits were unrestricted in practice, although limited by statute, a case of whisky having a much greater effective currency than the cost of a licence.

In the Katanga district of Belgian Congo there was a commendable disregard by the authorities of an Englishman's eccentricity. The ivory obtained was therefore most satisfactorily impressive. Its value at the Coast being one pound per pound weight, and the smallest tusk shot either by Lord Kingston or by Ronald being a perfectly even forty-six pounder, the final capital value exceeded

the outlay on the whole trip, while leaving ample margin for the return to England of representative trophies

Thus the conclusion of an expedition more advantageous perhaps in experience and opportunity than edifying in refinement or culture, found Ronald home again in time for the horse-show season of 1913

Meanwhile, on his property in Somerset, a controversy had arisen over the question of a local right of way. The Council claiming the right were polite but adamant, and after a series of negotiations it looked as if Ronald might be faced with the cost of a petition to the House of Lords in order to preserve his right, established over six hundred years previously. The Council published a report of these proceedings, ending with a reference to the great courtesy with which Ronald had met their Committee 'and the extreme fairness with which he had discussed the matter'. It concludes with these words 'The subject was then dropped and presumably as far as the Council are concerned the right of way may be asserted at discretion until it is proved in the Courts that it does not exist.'

This experience confirmed his belief that the days of the Squirearchy were past, and he determined privately to retire from any form of landed proprietorship forthwith. So he turned his mind again to the old idea of visiting Lake Chad either from Morocco or the Sudan. He had a particular aversion at that time for the Sudan, believing it to be a track so beaten that he would find paper bags, orange pips, and other relics of picnic parties on each bank of the Nile — and in fact when finally he arrived there he noted that a wealthy visitor preceding him had found the waters of the Nile unpalatable for the dilution of his dentifrice, so he had taken on board his dahobia twenty thousand bottles of soda water as a more wholesome alternative.

The overthrow of the Khalifa at Omdurman in 1898 had resulted in the new Sudan Government recognising Ali Dinar as Sultan of Darfur on payment of a yearly tribute. Beyond that condition the Darfuris were allowed freedom, apparently to exclude globe-trotters from their territory by their own time-honoured means. The Sudan Government was therefore even more obdurate about such a project than the Sultan, and they all smiled the wrong way. But the Sultanate of Darfur straddled the

route to Lake Chad and seemingly blocked any advance by that approach

The caravan route through Morocco was, on the other hand, clear enough Marshal Lyautey had effectively put down rebellion in Southern Morocco, and since the autumn campaigning season ran from August to October, the moment seemed propitious So one Thursday late in August, Ronald interviewed an estate agency in London, gave them particulars of the whole Somerset property, and knocking a considerable percentage off the actual value, ordered it to be sold On the following Monday he went home, having disposed of every foot of land in his possession

It was October when he and Violet (together with a battery of rifles, although game in the country he expected to pass was negligible) arrived at Tangier Ronald immediately made contact with Mr White, the British Minister, and with the famous *Times* correspondent Walter B Harris, who had lived and travelled in Morocco for over thirty years, and through them with sundry Arab and French authorities They also found Mr and Mrs Lavery, and a Miss Victoria Cobb, a 'Little Woman' of the Jane Austen school, and of astonishing vagueness Yet this shy retiring little person, who apparently could scarcely buy herself a railway ticket, was in fact a pioneer of woman's exploits along untrdden paths, and had actually crossed the Gobi Desert without any white escort In such company Violet installed herself at the Hotel de France

Then Ronald sailed round the Spanish zone of hostilities to Casablanca, for Spain was still engaged in her never-ending war against the Riffs, and presented himself to French headquarters at Marrakech He was most kindly received by M de Saint Aulaire, the deputy civil representative and Minister of France, and was present at a wonderful fantasia, the wild display of Arab horsemanship held on the local Marshan

His prospective expedition was admirably arranged under the efficient supervision of a valiant Algerian Goumier whom the French kindly attached to him, and his intention was to work through the Tarza corridor via Meknes, Fez, Tarza, and Querief But the Atlas Mountains were under snow, and Ronald hates cold On reaching the Tichka Pass he found himself faced by arctic conditions, and reflecting that his purpose was neither that of an

explorer nor the completion of a duty, he turned about in search of a kinder climate. He returned to Tangier, and with Violet crossed to Gibraltar. They then went on to Khartoum, and establishing Violet in the Grand Hotel, Ronald consulted Slatin Pasha with a view to shooting the White Nile, the Blue Nile, the Dinder River, and the Provinces of Senaar and Kordofan, in fact the whole of the Sudan game fields. Slatin took charge of all this, with the result that detailed arrangements were at once commenced under the supervision of the Inspector-General of the Sudan Government.

The amazing story of Major-General Baron Sir Rudolph von Slatin Pasha, K.C.M.G., as prisoner of the Mahdi, is too well known to need repetition.

Ronald knew Slatin quite well. He had met him first when dining in London at the Shikar Club, probably the most exclusive club in the world. Its ideals are to bring the old-time hunters into contact with the aspirant who carries a gun, and its objects are to maintain the true standards of sportsmanship, to deprecate squandered bullets or swollen bags, to foster the love of forest, mountain, and desert, the strenuous pursuit of a wary and dangerous quarry, the instinct for a well-devised approach to an accurately judged shooting distance, and finally to insist upon the patient retrieve of a wounded animal.

The members of this club used to dine at the house of Lord Lonsdale in Carlton House Terrace, so the freemasonry established between them secured unlimited mutual assistance whenever they met in distant parts. It was this link, inspired by the personality of Lord Lonsdale himself, which set Slatin alight to help Ronald as he did.

Arrangements went on apace under the executive control of a Czech-Slovakian named Machulka, a protégé of Slatin. He spoke Czech, Arabic and German, with a rudimentary smattering of French and Italian. He was the same age as Ronald, an experienced naturalist and ethnographer, and as hard as whipcord. He had travelled in most parts of Africa and above all he was the trusted servant of Slatin.

These two were to spend nearly six months almost exclusively dependent upon each other, but with the additional companionship of certain high-caste Arabs with whom it was arranged that they should travel.

CHAPTER 13

1914

THE 22ND OF MARCH 1914 WAS AN EPOCH-MAKING SUNDAY IN Khartoum Francis McClean arrived in his aeroplane from Alexandria with three passengers By sheer pertinacity the result was achieved, for his machine broke down time after time, while he doggedly mended it in the desert and completed the journey three months after starting Khartoum was staggered Egypt and the Sudan were officially unbalanced by the intoxication of success, everyone excepting McClean himself Even his sister had come out from England to welcome him, but 'What's the good of a lion that won't roar?' said she, when her brother faded away and was lost in the background

Ronald had just returned from a long and very successful trip ending in the Gezira — the country between the Blue Nile and the White Nile He had started up the Nile as far as the Bahr Ghazal, had crossed the desert to Rosieres on the Blue Nile, and had returned thence to Khartoum via Barankwa, Karkoj, Senga and Sennar He had collected specimens of all the famous White group, excepting Leucoryx, and of the complete variety of game on both rivers There remained, however, certain omissions peculiar to the Dinder River, so it was decided that while final arrangements were being made by Slatin for the Kordofan trip, Ronald would return to Sennar, shoot the Dinder country, and be back again in Khartoum by the end of April

He accordingly started off with Machulka the following morning, arrived at Sennar that night, picked up seven servants and twelve camels ordered by Slatin, who overlooked nothing, and marched through the heat of the next day, reaching Senga at 6 30 in the evening At the Rest House they found Colonel Wallace and Captain Wood Martin, both of the Suffolk Regiment, on the way home from Dinder They had not done very well and were somewhat depressing Major Cameron, the Governor of Sennar, visited Ronald here on receiving a telegram from Slatin, and gave him every possible assistance, so they crossed the Blue Nile and

camped that night on the east side of the river in readiness for an early start

At 2.30 a.m. the Caravan was in motion for its cross-desert march to Abu Hashim and, after resting there the next day, set out towards Abu Ramla, about a hundred miles south-east on the Abyssinian border, where it arrived a fortnight later. Here an incident occurred which delayed them considerably. Ronald had been following an elephant with a particularly fine pair of tusks for that district, which led him well over the frontier into Abyssinia, and kept him camped there while the tusks were being chopped out. During this rather lengthy operation they were suddenly startled by the whizz of a bullet unpleasantly near. The camp was sheltered in fairly thick bush but surrounded by quite open country where the hobbled camels were out grazing. Then two more shots were fired at them and it became evident that they were being sniped by a party of Abyssinian elephant poachers or slave raiders from higher ground some distance away, and that something must be done quickly. It was agreed therefore that Machulka should keep two men and bury the tusks in some cache away from the carcass, while Ronald with the remainder should endeavour to enfilade the Abyssinians and drive them off — 'but above all,' said Machulka, 'do not spill blood.'

The manœuvre was successful, for the enemy bolted, but, as this obviously only afforded a temporary respite, Machulka broke camp at once, the camels were loaded as rapidly as circumstances permitted and the whole party retired. It seemed wise to profit by the shelter of the bush in order to avoid exposing the weakness of their number by coming out into the open, and this forced them out of their way, so they proceeded only at the slowest pace of about two miles an hour. Eventually these tactics had to be abandoned and a sort of running fight continued for several hours. It was essential to make pretence of travelling westward and yet not to get too far away from the tusks, but they had to mask their strength since there was no knowing how many Abyssinians there might be, and to resist the temptation of returning their fire because of possible complications. Moreover, it was extremely important to lure them away from the tusks, about which fortunately they knew nothing.

Under the protection of darkness, however, they doubled back

on their own tracks at top speed and shook off the marauders completely. Whatever tactics may have been intended failed or were frustrated, for, knowing nothing of the elephant, they naturally expected a continued retreat towards the safety zone and probably calculated upon a closer acquaintance during the night. In any case, Ronald recovered his tusks and moved off at dawn in the direction where the Abyssinians had first appeared, thus circumventing them from their own rear without either seeing them again or firing a shot.

But the interruption occasioned by these operations interfered with the time-table by three days, so, as late as the 28th of April, he telegraphed from Senga warning Slatin that he would be late at El Obeid for the Kordofan trip.

Meanwhile, when hunting in the very unpleasant black dusty cotton soil country east of a place called Khor Ein El Shems, Ronald found a giraffe, apparently asleep, so proceeded to stalk it with a view to close-up photography if possible. The result was not only satisfactory but so remarkable that in 1927 a series of his five photographs in sequence of this animal were reproduced and published in *The Field*¹ by request of its Editor. *The Field* has on its own initiative published illustrated accounts of Ronald's experiences more than once, but I think its distinguished Editor, the late Sir Theodore Cook, extended an even greater compliment by dedicating a book to him entitled *Character and Sportsmanship*. In sending him a presentation copy he wrote on the flyleaf, 'To the owner of the dedication by the writer of the rest.'

In spite of the fact that Ronald did not enjoy this trip (because within its proper sphere, that is to say, excluding the Abyssinian episode, it was too much on the beaten track), it was eminently successful, for it not only completed his required group of antelope, but it also provided two other features of note. The two sixty-odd-pound tusks proved to be record size for the Blue Nile district and turned out to be beautiful ivory, while his expenditure of ammunition was twenty-two shots for twenty-three head of game, including one elephant, three buffalo and three lion. The explanation is that on the 23rd of April in thin bush near Khor El Abiad Ronald was lying flat on the ground endeavouring to get an accurate shot at a particularly fine Tora Hartebeest within

¹ 4th August, 1927

about thirty yards of him. At the moment when it moved into position to give him this shot a small Abyssinian oribi came into the direct line, and he killed them both! The horns of the former measured twenty-three inches and the latter four and a half. They are both displayed now with his complete collection of Antelope heads at the British Empire Club in St James's Square.

An important official function was in full swing at the Grand Hotel. Slatin arrived rather late, handed a note to Ronald and then joined the Sirdar, Sir Reginald Wingate. The note said 'Herewith the telegram from Governor, Kordofan — I answered that you will nevertheless take the risk.' And the enclosure read 'Consider it most unlikely that he will get Oryx as they have all gone out west almost to Darfur frontier which is closed district and also waterless.' This confirmed the recognised conditions due to the exceptional year of drought, and hinted at the waning season, since the end of May signals a general exodus of white residents to escape the consuming desert heat.

It was now common knowledge that no game had remained in Kordofan. Earlier in the year two sportsmen trying for Leucoryx had been turned back by the arid state of the country. No game had been seen and the wells were failing. Even Lake Chad, some nine hundred miles west of El Obeid, had shrunk to half its normal size in consequence of the greatest drought ever recorded (but that was only known later) and Slatin's note seemed quite conclusive. So Ronald immediately replenished his equipment, and proceeded by train with the faithful Machulka to El Obeid, the administrative centre of Kordofan. There he found everything in readiness. Slatin's organisation embraced every conceivable detail, ten of his own superb thoroughbred riding camels in the pink of condition had been waiting for several days — these racing animals were bred for his personal use by the *Bisharin* Arab camel breeders in the mountainous pastures between the Nile and the Red Sea — and the plan of procedure, suggested by the Governor, Captain R. V. Savile, and decided upon, was that the party should consist of only four persons because the difficulties for both man and beast increase with numbers. It was also agreed that they should follow the old caravan route as far as the wells of Mazruba, about 150 miles north-west of El Obeid and, using this as their base or starting-point, that they should then keep closely

to a course due west, heading all the time in the direction of El Fasher, the capital of Darfur, so that a definite system might exist whereby their probable whereabouts could be estimated

With this route as a guide, two *kavasses*, or orderlies, mounted on the same fast camels, would follow with an emergency ration of dura meal and relays of water in *mussaks* or water-skins. Riding in pairs thus twice per week, it seemed probable that, with the remaining six camels, communication could be maintained, but if necessary the number would be increased, and in any case these relays would start at regular intervals and continuously.

Captain Savile nevertheless emphatically deprecated the whole business and openly stated that excepting for Slatin's arrangements and orders, he would have vetoed it.

The two Arabs detailed for this expedition were then produced, men of the desert who rarely approached so metropolitan a centre as El Obeid. They came up proudly and, with hands crossed upon their breasts, they offered dignified greeting. Their physique was wonderful, tall, sinewy, and handsome in their picturesque *jelabes* and *burnouses*,¹ their manners and deportment courteous and grand. They were sheikhs and, in fact, great aristocrats of the desert.

The four of them rode as far as Mazrub without incident, and almost without comment, for when an Arab of this type has recourse to speech his utterance is usually worth placing on record, according to the aphorisms which punctuate Ronald's diary. But during that ride of a hundred and fifty miles they came to understand each other better perhaps by their silence than by any attempt at conversation.

The desert wind blew all the time, and they were clothed and

¹ Ronald refers to *jelabes* and *burnouses* because he wore these himself and they are so called in Morocco, but the Kordofan Arabs' equivalent is the *jibba* or long shirt over which he wears a *hazam*, or cummabund, of wool at least fifteen to twenty feet long so that it becomes an extremely useful wrap, a turban, a *farda* or *kaffiyah*, that is his veil or cotton shawl, and over all his herdsman's cloak or *burnouse*. In addition to this clothing there are certain indispensable articles of personal equipment, namely, his *farwa* or sheepskin prayer-rug, *kurbash* or riding-whip, a sheath knife looped on to his arm above the left elbow by a plaited running leather band, a short sword hung by a cross-belt from the shoulder and tucked through the *hazam*, his long-barrelled gun, and probably a couple of spears.

veiled alike as a protection against the burning hot air driving the blistering sand, and they crouched low as their four beautiful animals covered the mileage with long graceful strides travelling comfortably at ten miles an hour. But there was no hurry — there rarely is in the desert — and they arrived on the evening of the third day.

Here they bivouacked and took stock of their position. There were nineteen wells worked as at Omdurman, as throughout the desert, and as described in the Bible. There were sheep and goats driven in from outlying districts, and there was a considerable gathering of herdsmen with their followers, surprised but not astonished by their arrival, who received them with great courtesy and hospitality, but game? No. No game had been seen for months. Oryx had moved away to the highlands of Darfur as predicted by Savile, and the desire to find them was evidently regarded as a preliminary stage of lunacy.

As the sun went down in its crimson glow, Ronald sat with Machulka on his richly coloured saddle-rug, leaning against Slatin's bejewelled red morocco leather saddles with trappings and fringes eighteen inches long.

'After this,' said Ronald, 'there will be no more water, we may travel for days for several hundred miles, we have been warned by these sons of the desert who know the grim irony of our quest. Are we justified in persisting and jeopardising these men's lives?'

'Trust Allah,' said Machulka. 'I will speak with them.' He called to the two, inviting them to share his carpet. But they stood silent, aloof and sphinx-like. He spoke to them at great length in the poetry of Arabic and the parables of speech.

'Do we follow the blood-red sun which now goes to rest behind the great mountain, Abu Kajaserug, or do we return while there is yet time, to the land of plenty?' That was the substance of his peroration, and still they both stood silent like two monuments to dignity.

'We will consider,' said one, and they moved away salaaming automatically. Presently they returned. It was almost dusk now. Again Machulka sought to offer his carpet, but with infinite delicacy his place was defined.

'On that rug there is space sufficient for twelve men, yet in the whole of Persia there is room for only one King,' and then followed

a monologue like one of David's psalms It was beautiful, descriptive, perfectly reasoned and phrased, but it ended with the reflection that they had set out for a definite purpose, and its final words were, 'We shall therefore continue but — we shall never return' *Malaish' Allah ma es saberin Salam aleikum!*'

It was quite dark now With slow deliberate movement they made obeisance and, gradually drawing away, their white robes mingled with the night

'What matter! God favours one who endures patiently '

When the daylight came they filled their *mussaks* and all four rode away to the west

To economise energy during the cool early hours, Ronald and his followers were striding along beside their camels when the faint tints of cobalt were emerging from their sombre background The rosy blush of dawn spread suddenly over the low eastern sky, and a saffron glow tinged with pale copper washed across the frowning flat desert Miles upon miles of scrub, relieved occasionally by great red boulders, were touched by waves of orange-pink, and then suddenly the whole vast panorama was bathed in crimson and gold The day had begun

Their distorted shadows lay like attenuated caricatures ahead The burning fiery dust, the relentless everlasting wind, and the heat of the day would soon be upon them, so the camels knelt and were mounted

From this elevation, high above the translucent refraction, the line of vision extended far into the dim distance, as far as six or even ten miles

At what seemed the extreme limit of his horizon, Ronald saw advancing towards him the reflection of his four camels in single file, ridden by his own quartet, an illusion? a mirage perhaps which disappeared and faded below the scintillating torrefaction as soon as he attempted to focus his vision

He said nothing, but an hour later Machulka drew up alongside

'The Envoys from El Fasher,' he explained, 'we shall pass them and they will bid us farewell' And almost as he spoke there came into view, on their direct line of approach, first the heads and then the bodies of four camels couched in line Then the full revealing blaze of the sun superimposed a jewelled cluster upon the half-

tones of the desert Four Arabs, motionless, silent and grim, their burnouses wrapped in thick folds about them, russet red, *eau de nil*, *tête de nègre* and mustard yellow, heavily turbanned, hooded and veiled, their long-barrelled, short-stocked, six-foot muzzle-loaders, embellished with ivory and metal inlay, resting athwart their knees The rich Venetian red morocco leather of their saddlery brought into brilliant chromatic harmony, in a setting of neutral tints, by the intensity of an equatorial sun And no sound but the soft padding of the passing camels and the deep-throated monotone prayer '*Salam Aleikum*'

'Aleikum es Salam'

'Allah yebarek fikum' (God's blessing be with you)

Ronald rode on followed by Machulka, but their two companions wheeled round and dismounted

An hour later when they all looked back from slightly rising ground, those four men of the desert were still seated motionless

They had recognised at first sight the graceful swing of Slatin's full-dress camel trappings and knew that some distinguished traveller was approaching, so they halted to give him the right of way, nor would they move until he had passed out of sight It is the courtesy of the Arab, the ancient custom of his desert

They were delegates carrying from El Fasher to Khartoum the annual tribute or subsidy of £500 which the Sultan of Darfur paid to the Sudan Government for the guarantee of its autonomy and the security of its frontiers They were racing against time, for they must return before the *haboubs* set in — those dreaded *haboubs* or windstorms, which in the space of a few hours could bury the whole of Omdurman in sand, Slatin had said, unless dug out by human diligence — and yet they had sacrificed two precious hours, required to cover perhaps twenty miles, because their code of chivalry so ordained Ronald had now travelled nearly four hundred miles, not by compass course but because he had been systematically quartering the country in search of game, and he was still piling up the mileage between himself and the safety of civilised necessities

Some days later they came to the Darfur Boundary, beyond which they had been sternly counselled not to continue because of difficulties with the Darfuris, who were apt to take summary and unpleasant notice of any intruder They believed, however, that

their fortunate encounter with the men from El Fasher had provided a charm against any rough work, or throat-cutting business

Thus far they had found no trace of game excepting Dorcas, a small desert gazelle, an occasional Ariel, and more recently Addra and Tiang, both of the Antelope family and reputed to live independently of water. These had been shot whenever possible not only for the meat, valuable though it was, but especially for the fat in which to cook dura meal and make a kind of Indian chupatti. The fat was equally required for external application, particularly for what Ronald calls 'sand cracks'. He always maintains that in really burning heat the most nutritious food consists principally of oil fats, sugar, and the hottest liquid one can swallow. The oil in a sardine tin, for example, is the most valuable part of its contents and can be drunk undiluted.

They had found no water, but their additional bi-weekly supply was reaching them regularly, and, to supplement this, they dug in likely wadis, or the sandy bed of a dry *khor*, and were thus often able to procure a brackish liquid, which, boiled with sweetened cocoa and sipped slowly, formed with dura and dried dates their staple diet. Now at last there was evidence that they had come up with game, so they established themselves at a spot on their direct course named Umm Gamut, because it had formerly been a frontier post selected, in better weather conditions, for its yield of water and pasture, and because the district was certainly an improvement upon that through which they had come.

The camels were showing symptoms of uneasiness. They had been going now for a fortnight. The shortage of rest, the want of water, and the impoverished grazing was beginning to tell on them. But here amidst hills and mountains the thin bush and scrub were more succulent, so it was decided to make a temporary base. They hobbled the camels on their grazing ground and rested for a whole day, expecting their relay of supplies on the morrow.

The next morning Ronald and Machulka set out with light loads on the two best-looking camels, intending to make a cast of some twenty miles around their bivouac. During most of the day they hobbled their beasts again and reconnoitred on foot, in different directions. They returned late that evening, having located large herds of game, including all the Kordofan variety, among the rocky mountains to the north. But no transport had arrived,

and one of their Arabs seemed to be sickening His tongue was swelling The next day Machulka remained with him, while the other two went out as before

Ronald shot nothing, but left his companion with both camels before reaching the game field, while he concerned himself with stalking Oryx and trying to pick out likely heads despite the extremely difficult shimmering light of a meridian sun At this time of day game is not easily disturbed and allows itself to be inspected at comparatively close quarters

The White Oryx must be almost the most beautiful of all the Sudan Antelopes with his chestnut-coloured back and all the rest pure white except the dark-brown marking on his sad pale face His horns, measuring from thirty-six to forty-five inches, slope in a gentle curve over his spine, and the female usually carries the longer horn This species is therefore the only one of which the female head is sought in addition to that of the male

For three days this same procedure continued Still no transport came Ronald stalked his game, lying about among them each day, but shooting nothing, while the others rested, and their sick man grew worse At last Ronald found what he wanted He came back that evening with two Leucoryx, each carrying a magnificent head Machulka came out to meet him Their sick man was dead '*Maiлаish*,' said his dignified colleague, '*Allah karim!* *Allah yeghfurlu!*' (Never mind! God is merciful! May God forgive him his sins)

They held a council of action and at dawn started on their return journey But they wrapped the *kaffiyah*, or veil, about the body according to custom and laid him upon his sheepskin, for an Arab prays upon his *farwa*, takes his last stand upon it when fighting, and prefers to be killed upon it So they buried him, although burial as we understand it is superfluous in such conditions The Sudan sun has its own unequalled method of conducting burial rites, and the ever-shifting sand completes the work But they brought away the chaplet of beads which he wore — a wonderful rope of gamboge-coloured amber beads about four feet long, graduated from the size of a normal hen's egg to that of a pigeon's egg — and with his saddle empty they set out on a journey which, even then, threatened to become grim and hazardous



They were approaching the limit of their resources, but they had not yet arrived at Mazruba. Machulka and Ronald were lurching along — alone, and on foot, taking it in turns to lead the string of two camels, weak and unable now to carry them. They had lost two beasts and their second Arab companion. The first had succumbed to some natural complaint, aggravated no doubt by exceptional strain, while the second had died because Allah so decided, for Allah controls the destiny of everyone, even a scorpion '*Kullu shai bi iradet illahi!*' he had said himself (Everything happens as God ordains.)

Before this last loss the *haboubs* had overtaken them. They had shot every Gazelle they could find in order to squeeze a canvas bucket full of water from its stomach, and for over a week the average ration thus obtained had yielded one pint per man per day.

Ronald was struggling beside the rear camel attached by its guide rope to the tail of the other, and Machulka led to a compass bearing. Ronald could not see Machulka because a whirlwind had just passed over them and the atmosphere was like a London pea-soup fog and almost suffocating. It would take at least an hour to clear, even assuming another did not stop them first. If that happened, man and beast would crouch on the ground while it played tantalisingly around them for ten, perhaps twenty, minutes, during which time everything within reach would be out of sight, anything detachable might be snatched up and hurled away, with hurricane force, irretrievably into the darkness, nor was the danger of being struck by stone, shingle, or rock negligible.

Over the flat uncompromising red sandy surface they struggled slowly as with baggage camels, their beautiful beasts now reduced to the level of the common herd with the same mournful accompaniment of groans and discontent, dodging tufts of dried mimosa bush or, more often, loose aggressive stones.

Ronald was becoming anxious about his reckoning. According to their time-table and direction, they should have made Mazruba by now. But Mazruba consisted only of nineteen wells within a very small area. It was a simple matter to miss Mazruba altogether after walking almost blind by dead reckoning across two hundred miles of angry desert. It had been extremely difficult to fix his position or to use his theodolite, since the sight of a constellation by night had become as rare as that of the sun by day. Ronald was rumin-

ating and wondering why the camels showed no sign of hopefulness — but, of course, the wind was following them from the west and flinging their own dust pitilessly after them Would it be wiser to lie up altogether and await an opening in the dust clouds? But they could ill afford to wait Then his thoughts began wandering, and then Machulka stopped

They had come upon sheep, sheep and goats Hundreds of them apparently Carcasses mostly, but some alive Dark patches here and there, kneeling camels, and low black goat-hair Arab tents anchored to the ground, hundreds of them too More carcases, and presently the sound of husky voices and the groaning moan of camels They had reached the wells of Mazrub

Up to this point Ronald's contemporary notes are explicit, accurate, descriptive and even discursive, giving his periodical position and the hour, whenever he was able to find it, with the conditions then prevailing, but here they become laconic and record merely outstanding facts

'Only one well working — eighteen gone dry The *baggaras* [cattle-owning nomads] from outlying districts have all concentrated here since we passed before Hundreds of natives waiting fanatically, or is it fatalistically? Thousands of cattle dead or dying They have watered us, man and beast, but impossible to intrude further'

That night they started again with the remnants of greenish liquid in their *mussaks* and a hundred and fifty miles before them the melancholy creaking of the water-wheel at the solitary well gradually died away

Ronald was leading, but it was easier now to keep direction because normally a well-defined track, though now completely obliterated, led past three great mountains rising some six hundred feet above the plain at approximately equal distances of some twenty to thirty miles, Gebels El Gleit, Um Shedira and Abu Sinum After that a true south-easterly course led to El Obeid But a caravan track centuries old and several hundred yards wide, although quite indistinguishable itself, can be readily followed even in bad visibility because of the less stunted growth of scrub in the desert on either side

The hour should have been about sunrise had it been possible to see The wind flayed them on the quarter instead of astern as

before, for their course had changed to the south of east, but at least it supplied a driving force. Ronald was trudging along on the sheltered side and concentrating upon direction, though unable to see beyond the ground on which he trod.

Suddenly, down went his camel. And away in the distance came the roar of another devilish *haboub*. Instinctively, though in a state in which his mind seemed divorced from his body, Ronald walked round the recumbent beast expecting to find Machulka. But there was no second camel attached to his tail! He walked right round, and then wrapped himself about under the lee of the camel's body.

The great inferno came thundering down, scattering or snatching everything on its mad career and leaving blackness swirling in its wake. Ronald sat still, a huddled heap. His camel also lay still, prostrate upon its side. In such conditions the animal always kneels with its rump to the wind and its neck stretched low along the ground. Yet Ronald remained there unmindful of this fact, vaguely wondering about Machulka, and unaware that his camel was dead.

He began dreaming. How long would it be before the sand buried him if they waited thus without moving? Curious about vultures in Kordofan they seemed to have a nicer discrimination between the quick and the dead than their brother bird the aasvogel of the South African karoo but perhaps nature hereabouts buries a carcass so quickly two hours, Slatin had said.

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The small white community at El Obeid was now reduced to only five Europeans. The remainder had gone, and Captain Savile the Governor was probably already in England. In the coolest room of the Mess Ronald and Machulka were reposing on two camp-beds. In the corner were stacked their rifles, saddlery, and the famous Leucoryx heads. The unglazed window-frames were fitted with fine-meshed wire gauze and, over this, damp cotton netting strained on wooden stretchers excluded sand, heat and insects.

'Feeling better now?' said Mr Evans, the manager of the bank. 'You shall walk across to the bank with me this evening, it will do

you good,' and he handed Ronald a note from the post office replying to his enquiry for letters

'Very much regret to report that there is no mail for you'

The bank stood opposite the Mess, a single-storied white building about a hundred yards away across the sand. There was no street or road. They trudged across arm in arm and entered the rather spacious two-roomed bank. Evans planted Ronald in a commodious deck-chair beside an office writing-desk and left him. There was no other furniture, but on the walls hung a collection of school-group photographs with coloured House and College crests above, and copper-plated names arranged below Marlborough College groups!

When they were together again Ronald said, 'Evans, you don't recognise me, do you?'

'Of course! Look, we are both in this group together,' which was so, 'that is why I was so anxious to pull you through' (And there were only five white men in El Obeid) Then Evans told him the story of what had happened

After the last file of camels had delivered supplies and were returning, they met their outward-bound pair and reported Ronald's party heading on a direct line for El Fasher, as had been agreed. The next pair duly reached the Darfur Boundary which they, quite properly, hesitated to cross, but although they must have been almost within rifle-shot of Ronald's bivouac all trace had vanished, and, failing to locate it, they assumed the party had either continued into prohibited territory, or had been lured off their course in pursuit of game. In any case, they were themselves strictly rationed with the express purpose of keeping them to an exact time-table and had no alternative but to retrace their steps. In due course they met and turned back their own succeeding file, and when a whole week's supply of undelivered water came home to El Obeid, Ronald and his party, 'feared lost,' was so reported officially to Khartoum.

It was arranged, nevertheless, that daily patrols should be sent out as far as Mazruba in case of news — had Ronald guessed this, they could of course have waited there — 'and,' explained Evans, 'it was our daily patrol that found you'

'And Machulka?'

Machulka was discovered in precisely the same condition about

two and a half miles astern of Ronald It subsequently transpired that, when he knew his camel to be failing, he had deliberately cut its guide rope so as to detach Ronald instead of holding him back Up to that moment there had been no evidence that Machulka too was nearing the end of his tether

The absence of mail was thus accounted for, and Ronald reported his arrival by telegram to Slatin in Khartoum, but until he returned there himself he didn't know that Slatin never received this news Slatin was on his way to England via Trieste and a circuitous route through the Dolomites He had gone, Sir Reginald Wingate and Sir Lee Stack had gone Everyone seemed to have gone, so Ronald followed by leisurely stages He sailed down the Nile when the thermometer registered 122 Fahrenheit in the coolest spot on deck He found it delicious and invigorating He took ship and sailed the whole way to Tilbury Docks There was no hurry He did not know that he would arrive there within a few days of the Great War

CHAPTER I 4

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ONE OF THE ODDITIES IN RONALD'S CAREER IS THE FACT THAT HE invariably turned up at the psychological moment when movement was afoot Maurice Gifford had remarked upon this when visiting him at Wynberg Hospital with Rudyard Kipling 'Arrives in the nick of time,' said he, 'tumbles into the middle, gets wounded and goes home!' recalling his arrival at Pitsani only three days before the expedition started 'At Bulawayo, two days before Gifford's Horse rode out, did his job, and went home Fetched up for the Boer War in October with one of the earliest contingents, gets wounded in February, and goes home!'

And now, having been away in Africa for nine months, he arrived in London towards the end of July to find war imminent It was declared a few days later

He therefore sat down in the Naval and Military Club to write two letters with complete confidence that a satisfactory reply to each would come by return of post The first was an official application to the War Office asking to be reappointed to his Regiment from the Reserve of Officers The second made reference to this application, and requested the Officer Commanding the 6th Dragoon Guards at Canterbury to support it by an application for his immediate appointment With guileless confidence he overhauled his kit and awaited results The Military Secretary at the War Office presented his compliments, adding that 'a note had been made of his offer of services in case of emergency' Canterbury replied, 'Instructions have been received not to entertain any more applications.'

This was August 1914! This was also Ronald's first reverse He found himself killing time in the Naval and Military Club alone with very senior retired admirals and generals, *accabes* for the most part by gout He felt himself a proud but extremely junior member of that select service club, election to which had involved a delay of fifteen years and an entrance fee of fifty guineas

He sat down one day in the corner of a long settee At the other

end reclined one of the distinguished veterans Both gazed dreamily into space and between them, equally unwanted, lay a copy of the *Globe* newspaper After many minutes Ronald asked, 'Are you using this paper, sir?' The great man turned a slow but astonished eye towards him, pressed a button on the wall — fortunately within a few inches of his head — and relapsed, pending the arrival of a velvet-breeched footman 'Waiter,' he was then able to say, 'I think this member *wants* something,' and he waved a languid hand in the direction of Ronald, who since 'hat day has always maintained a most discreet reserve in his own club

The situation became intolerable The Military Secretary, Lieut -General Codrington, wrote in person, 'Owing to your disability there is little likelihood at present of your services being utilised' Colonel P D Fitzgerald, late of the 11th Hussars but now in charge of the Cavalry Section at the War Office, became quite annoyed with Ronald for sitting on his doorstep day after day, but Ronald knew him — he had travelled back from Morocco with him, so his *farouche* air and terrific eyebrows failed to endorse the constant rebuke, 'You're making a nuisance of yourself We don't want fellows like you, already drawing a wound pension, but men with a clean slate' Ronald, continuing to sit at his door, assured him that he was 'paid to be worried'

The position proved untenable In despair, Ronald invited the majordomo of the Curzon Hotel — a Swiss named Favrite whom he knew well — to come to Paris with him, and off they went together They stayed at his customary little Hotel Castille in the Rue Cambon, and after combing all the hotel registers in Paris, Favrite in one direction and he in another, for a soft-hearted recipient of his sorry tale, Ronald found Lord Robert Cecil, who then and there came to the rescue and constituted himself an official godfather

After an all-night sitting beside Lord Robert's bed, for he was ill and confined to his room, Ronald returned immediately to London with a long and personal letter to Sir Reginald Brade, Secretary of the Army Council, from Lord Robert, the Paris Commissioner of the British Red Cross Society

This letter set out the difficulty presented by constant enquiries about casualties at the front, of whom no further news was obtainable It related how in such cases the truth generally turned out

to be that the officer had either died, or been detained at a clearing hospital In certain cases the British Red Cross had felt impelled to communicate by letter with the Royal Army Medical Corps, or with some officer of the combatant forces asking for news, a most undesirable procedure, but one which would otherwise be taken by the relatives of the wounded officer If a suitable representative could visit the front and find out the facts about such cases without getting in the way of anyone, it would greatly relieve the situation and remove a burden from officers otherwise engaged The bearer of this letter seemed in every way suitable, had served in the Army with distinction, had the necessary temperament, address, and understanding of the French and their language, etc etc

To General Lambton, the Military Secretary at G H Q , he wrote in a similar sense 'It often happens that in such cases nothing is known except at the front, the result is that relations write letters to any officer whom they may know, particularly if he is on the Headquarters Staff, and he is thus placed in a position of either appearing brutal and unfeeling, or of adding to his already onerous duties, that of soothing bereaved relatives ' Then followed a reasoned and sympathetic reference to the feelings of the relatives of the fallen and 'You know as well as I do how very sensitive English public opinion is upon this point '

A telegram in reply to this letter conveyed approval of the proposed appointment, and Lord Robert immediately wrote to Ronald 'In accordance with the Military Secretary's telegram you must await formal sanction from the Adjutant-General, which I hope will reach you in the course of a very few days, or perhaps hours ' He urged him to get up to the front at once and continued, 'I am sure it is quite unnecessary for me to remind you how very important it is that you should fall in with any wishes expressed by the Headquarters Staff The success of your mission entirely depends on whether you can get them to be favourable to it, and, since they are very busy and much harassed, you will have to employ all the tact and judgment of which you are possessed '

- Meanwhile Sir Ian Malcolm, Lord Robert's understudy, had also become active in London and had written to Ronald, 'If you will call at the War Office on Sir Reginald Brade to-morrow, Thursday, during the morning he will give you instructions I gather from him that he has now received an answer from the front

and that you are to be allowed to attach yourself (on our behalf) to the Lines of Communications You will be given a letter to General Maxwell to this effect, and General Macready will also be notified I think it will be up to you to make a big thing of this as you will be the first liaison officer between the Army and the Red Cross'

At this early period, great difficulties of co-operation existed between the R A M C and the organization of the British Red Cross and St John of Jerusalem, so that Ronald's appointment may admittedly have supplied a convenient *modus vivendi*

It put him into action straight away It gave him his Mons Star for the retreat from Mons, and the Cross of an Esquire of St John of Jerusalem for discovering and identifying casualties during the uninterrupted rearguard action lasting for ten days

On the 24th of August the British Army commenced its retirement of 180 miles from Mons, pivoting upon the French centre at Verdun It was harassed all the way by von Kluck's army, more than double its strength, and by Marwitz's Cavalry It continued in perfect order on either side of the forest of Mormal, past St Quentin, over the River Aisne, and across the Marne, until on the 4th of September it was actually within sight of the distant Forest of Fontainebleau

On September 7th Ronald dined with only four other persons at the Ritz Hotel in Paris It was the night when von Kluck, encouraged by his seemingly victorious progress, had dangerously exposed the right flank of his own army General Galliéni, a veteran of the Franco-Prussian War of 1870, and conqueror of Madagascar, was now Military Governor of Paris He mobilised every available vehicle in the capital He transported the 7th Division, half the 4th Corps, to Betz, forty miles away, in the taxicabs of Paris, and he subsequently repeated this manœuvre by sending out a detachment of Zouaves to make a counter-attack near Senlis Joffre assumed a counter-offensive, sent the German Army in full retreat, and saved Paris

During those few eventful days every train and every road was alive with evacuees The exodus to Havre in the north and to the provinces in the south, had continued unabated, and kept Ronald chafing but immobile in Paris His enthusiasm brought mention of his name in dispatches to such purpose that General

Macready, the Adjutant-General in France, declared 'This Officer's activities are more likely to contribute to the casualty list than to relieve it They must cease'

And thus, confirming the dictum of Maurice Gifford on a previous occasion, he found himself eventually at home again, and temporarily on the shelf

After the retreat from Mons and the arbitrary decree of the Adjutant-General in France, Ronald was left completely in the air Short-lived though it had been, however, his appointment appears to have served a useful purpose, because the technical difficulties existing previously, which had so incontinently kept British Red Cross effort merely on the periphery, were now overcome and thereafter that organization contributed its valuable offering in the very centre of the official circle Moreover, Ronald himself was received with smiles instead of frowns, and although miscalculating his chances at the moment, he was no longer destined for the wilderness

Seeing no opening whatever with the British Army, he applied at the French Embassy for employment with the Foreign Legion, the only way for an Englishman to be accepted in the French Army The military attache, General Vicomte de la Panouse, commended him to the recruiting offices established at Dunkirk, Havre, Rouen, Cherbourg or St Malo Meanwhile Ronald was completing a small job for Sir Reginald Brade, who then detailed him for another and, as it turned out, a curiously pregnant mission

As a preliminary move in the war the authorities in Germany had already published a book in America designed to excite public opinion in favour of Central Europe It was considered desirable, therefore, that a complementary work in the contrary sense, and favourable to the Allies, should be produced forthwith This was entrusted to Harold Begbie, an author at the height of his power just then He had already found additional fame as a recruiting officer by writing a song, 'What d'ye lack, Sonny, what d'ye lack?' which was posted on hoardings throughout the country

Under the aegis of the War Office he was to visit all the allied fronts, lines of communication and bases, and to have his book available for publication in the United States in a fortnight Ronald was to be his sole companion and escort

In ordinary circumstances so comprehensive a circular tour should have been full of interest and incident. As it was, the experience, so far as concerned Ronald, became panoramic and kaleidoscopic, vibrating from one intensity to another. Yet Harold Begbie assimilated all he saw, and produced his book, telegraphing or telephoning entire chapters at odd moments squeezed from an overloaded programme. At the end of this galloping inspiration, after twenty-four hours' sleep in London, Ronald came out of his trance and reported to Sir Reginald Brade.

Now it happened that before leaving on this last adventure, and before addressing himself to the French Embassy, he had indited a personal and very concise letter to Lord Kitchener as a last, though seemingly forlorn, hope. In order to insure its personal delivery he had entrusted this to Mr Robert Donald of the *Daily Chronicle*, because of his ready access both to Mr Lloyd George, the Minister of Munitions, and to Lord Kitchener, the Secretary of State for War. So convincing was the argument set out in his letter that he found awaiting his return an acknowledgement from Colonel Sir Arthur Leetham, who invited him to call in person. Ronald therefore arrived at the War Office with two important interviews in prospect. He discovered immediately that Sir Reginald Brade had also seen his letter to Lord Kitchener and that his star was apparently looking brighter, but Fate has a sense of humour, whenever one spots a plum she immediately purloins it and hangs it upon some unexpected branch.

Ronald was almost hoping to see Lord Kitchener himself, but a chance remark to Sir Reginald Brade produced the repercussion of a depth charge. Ronald was explaining that although he and Harold Begbie had been provided with special passports, certificates of identity, *sauf conduits* and *laissez-passers*, with 'exceptional speed' passes, and passes issued under the most exacting conditions to any, or all zones of the Allied Armies, yet the one pass which had produced the most immediate reaction abroad, and had disposed at once of any threatening difficulty, was a white voucher endorsed by his own (Sir Reginald's) name in facsimile, and clearly not intended to be operative out of England.

This voucher was a printed form, with a perforated edge, torn out of a counterfoil book and issued with the most superficial precautions. It was addressed to the Railway Transport Officer, and

stated, 'The bearer of this voucher is travelling on service approved by the Authorities, and is to be exempted from search when proceeding to the Continent' Sir Reginald was so horrified by this news that he telephoned to the Director of Military Intelligence and sent Ronald to the room of that distinguished General without delay

And it now seemed clear that a fortunate cast had started Ronald off on a hot scent, so he ran it to ground, and then looked expectantly to Major-General Sir George Macdonogh

It came out that while certain Home Office and Foreign Office restrictions still obtained, there was no military control whatever at ports of entry into Great Britain, that the Channel traffic of civilians not only hampered the transport of officials, but greatly increased the difficulty of accommodating hospital cases, or of excluding undesirables, that an immediate control system was imperative, and that this must be established under the War Office while using the Foreign Office Passport as its executive document It must be worked in relationship with the French Consul at Bedford Square, with a separate Control Officer at each port, and an alternative office in Paris

Resulting from all this a building next door to the French Consulate was obtained, a *guichet* was pierced between the two houses, and through the medium of the Press the public was advised that all persons travelling to the Continent on a British passport must first obtain a War Office *visa* at the Military Permit Office, 19 Bedford Square

Since the French office dealt with everyone of foreign nationality, this system meant in effect that henceforth no one could either leave or enter Great Britain without coming under War Office surveillance

It also meant that Ronald received the following telegram 'Appointed General Staff Officer third grade in charge of the Military Permit Offices AAA Take up duties forthwith AAA Acknowledge by wire Adjutant-General'

* A period of intense activity followed. The British public, jealous of its liberty, is nevertheless the most law-abiding body, and raised no dissenting voice. It arrived in such volume that the Home Office ordered mounted police to regulate its lawful ways. Its metal had to be tempered by the gentle touch of tact and con-

ciliation, for power is a dangerous weapon, bitterly resented by that same independent spirit if abused. For days, running into weeks, the fate of that office, or, more correctly, the tenure of the officer in charge, tottered in the balance. Apart from stereotyped communications, he signed an average of eighty personal letters daily, but he used the official termination without exception and, although pedantically perhaps, he had 'The Honour to be' everyone's 'Obedient Servant'. He secured thereby the restraint and the respect due to his office.

Ronald himself remained unrecognised, for he rarely appeared, although no British passport-holder gained admittance to the zone of the armies without the counter-signature of his name. It was better that the Chief Permit Officer should be unseen and remain a powerful lever in the hands of his able staff. Great potency was thus available for use by such experienced dialecticians as his second in command, for example, Captain G P Langton (now Mr Justice Langton), and by some twenty carefully selected individuals combed out of the Directorate of Military Intelligence, who were between them multi-lingual.

During the period of Ronald's command this office passed over 100,000 civilians across the Channel without a single mistake as to *bona fide* identity, or complaint from those who succeeded in establishing their claim to travel, or from the far greater number who failed to do so.

But apart from contra-espionage and normal traffic control, the increasing difficulty of limiting cross-Channel movement in favour of official requirements was developing rapidly. Heads of organisations responsible for civilian work among the armies in the Field were accordingly invited to meet in conference at the Permit Office, with extremely helpful results.

The next step was to apply similar restrictions to trade and commercial demands. Large differences existed, for whereas one buyer represented a purchasing value of perhaps £300 per annum, another showed annual disbursements amounting to as much as £50,000. Ronald therefore took every opportunity of interviewing heads of commercial houses whose interests were vested in trade in textile goods. He consulted the British Chamber of Commerce. The Chairman of the Wholesale Textile Association formed an advisory committee of four gentlemen with himself at their head,

and a very short experience confirmed the belief that in existing conditions, and without prejudice to trade, the entire retail traffic could be stopped without disadvantage or injustice. After inviting the views therefore of the French Chamber of Commerce and interviewing Monsieur Eugene Hennequy, a member, and Conseiller du Commerce Exterieur de la France who, in company with his opposite number of the British Chamber of Commerce, received Ronald's proposals with absolute cordiality, he reported to his immediate superior officer at the War Office.

The reply described the arrangements as admirable, and authorised Ronald to put them into operation at his discretion. He therefore wrote to all retail establishments, great and small, pointing out that every assistance must be given to the Government, firstly in maintaining the Armies abroad, and secondly in maintaining the commerce of the country. That the latter must be done without injuring trade, either in England or in France, through the medium of the wholesale houses, or through the usual trade agencies abroad. The cumulative effect was an enormous reduction in cross-Channel traffic, as without mention of lesser concerns there were at least 200 houses, all of which sent buyers abroad at each season for practically every department. But the fact that not a single objection was raised seems a striking tribute to the co-operative capacity, and the ready versatility, of the British citizen.

One of the more unhappy facets of this many-sided experience was, of course, the unseen net spread for the unsuspecting person engaged upon espionage. The circumstances leading up to the shooting at Vincennes on the 15th of October, 1917, of Margherite Gertrude Zelle, better known as Mata Hari, a Dutch dancer but a German spy, have been recounted in detail. But the case of another woman less well known went through Ronald's hands.

Just before Italy came into the war a marriage took place at Naples between a British dentist named Smith and a German, who thereby obtained British nationality. On Italy's declaration of war in May 1915, Mr and Mrs Smith were repatriated, and the dental surgeon continued to practise in Manchester. Then he mysteriously died, and his widow's, apparently innocuous, communications with Germany via neutral countries, and even via South Africa, became increasingly interesting. Eventually in April

1918 she appeared at the Old Bailey, not in connection with her husband's death, but on the charge of espionage. She was admirably defended by Counsel, who nevertheless permitted her to go into the witness-box. Sir Archibald Bodkin, the Public Prosecutor, then subjected her to a relentless cross-examination. Her name was Frau von Zastrow, her two brothers were high officials in the German Navy and the German Foreign Office respectively, and the actual appointment of the former was shown in the German Navy List of that year, which Sir Archibald had in front of him at the moment. It was not in the public, or national, interest to divulge that fact, however, for not only was it a confidential publication in German, but our own Navy List of the year was not in circulation as early as April. Frau von Zastrow was interned for the duration of the war.

CHAPTER 15

1916-1918

DURING THAT PERIOD AT THE MILITARY PERMIT OFFICE THE personal contacts were as memorable for their diversity as for their number Dr Axel Munthe, for example, a Doctor of Medicine of the Faculty of Paris, a Swede of pungent personality, and a member of the St James's Club in London He sang and played the piano beautifully, yet any reference to his accomplishments was at once side-tracked or burlesqued He sent Ronald his book with the inscription, 'I send you this little book of mine, with my thanks for your courtesy,' which had consisted of listening to him for an enthralling half hour And G Bernard Shaw, whose bright eyes twinkled at the mention of any other book than his own, and who in his clear, high-pitched, smooth Irish brogue, regaled Ronald with his diatribes upon many subjects

From a courier who passed periodically through the office, Ronald received a letter dated 19th December 1916, Grand Hotel d Europe, Petrograd, containing this sentence—'The conspirators are all friends of mine, and I am told the removing of the objectionable man will take place before the 31st' (the Moujik Rasputin was destroyed on the morning of the 30th), and three weeks later on the 4th of January, that being the Russian Christmas Eve, 'As yet no one has confessed to the actual murder The Grand Duke Dimitri Pavlovitch is under arrest in his own Palace Since Peter the Great put his own son and heir under arrest, such a thing has never happened and the Emperor Paul was murdered for threatening to do the same thing'

But this event was sufficiently disquieting to suggest enemy influence at work both in the Russian Court and in political circles, since the new Prime Minister Shturmer, who came to power also in December 1916, was wholly pro-German Subversive propaganda had gained influence Corruption in the Army following mal-administration of national resources proclaimed disaster The view was widely held both in France and in England that Germany, quick to recognise the former, was

deliberately encouraging the latter in the tactical hope of forcing a separate peace upon Russia. And events which followed certainly showed that if Germany had not actually fathered the situation in Russia at that time, she was at least the *accoucheuse* of its issue.

As if to throw additional light on her strategic policy, a confidential memorandum from the German General Staff came to light, showing their anticipation of a prospective European War, since it was dated 19th March 1913. One paragraph read

'Try to make disturbance in the North of Africa. It is a way of absorbing the forces of the enemy. It is necessary to get into contact by means which we know, with Egypt, Tunis, Algeria and Morocco to prepare against the possibility of a European War. In case of a War these allies should be recognised officially.'

In September 1917 Ronald was transferred and put in charge of the Senior Branch of his Department.

This tempted him to explore the origin, methods and machinery of Intelligence, and he soon found himself tracing the meshes of intrigue dating from the Middle Ages. By the seventeenth century, Intelligence had begun to be systematised. Louis XIV had his agents in Flanders, Spain and Italy. Louis XV extended the method by purchasing venal envoys of other monarchs to provide him with information, for example, Galitzin, the Russian Ambassador at the Court of St James. Galitzin's successor, de Gross, who received £100,000 from the French, was more than suspect to the English, and on his retirement, they made representations that Woronzoff alone would be acceptable as Ambassador. As a result, during the Seven Years War, the French were sadly deficient in reports from this country.

In 1917 it was reported that the Russian Intelligence Service in Allied countries had in fact yielded to German pressure, that they had four centres in Paris, impregnable, because any overt act by the French Deuxieme Bureau would constitute a breach of diplomatic privilege, and an offence against an Allied Power, that they were briefed to spread revolutionary and pacifist propaganda so as to create a defeatist public opinion (evidence of which had been very pronounced among the more recent classes of recruits), and

finally, that the officers at the head of this Russian organisation in Paris worked in collaboration with one of the Grand Duchesses resident in Switzerland, and used the Danish diplomatic bag to Copenhagen

The French therefore warned the British Intelligence Service against their Russian colleagues, and precautionary methods were adopted on both sides of the Channel. But Whitehall set its countenance rigidly against the French system of *agents provocateurs*, so executive officers were forced to act, and administrative officers to wink, because those greater than they preferred temperate benevolence to the substantial requirements of the country.

The problem now presented was dangerous and delicate. The principals in Paris were an officer named Ignatieff, and one Pecnikoff, an ex-chauffeur to the Tsar. But there were presumably others, who, either deliberately or unwittingly, were agents of the system. When therefore a senior officer left Paris with special despatches for Petrograd via England, he was 'escorted' from the Gare du Nord. He arrived in London with an ordinary canvas sack, lashed and sealed at the neck, handcuffed to his wrist. It contained several official despatch pouches and was thus conveniently carried all the time by himself. So far no impression had been made upon him, every artifice calculated to tempt him had failed to delay his journey in London. And he left again at once by the Scottish mail train to join the usual convoy at Leith. As he was apparently impervious to feminine charm, his fellow travellers to Scotland were changed, but at Leith, his canvas bag and its seal were still intact.

Ronald went across to see the Director of Naval Intelligence at the Admiralty, but found him away indisposed. 'I want you to send a signal stopping that convoy,' he said to Claud Serocold, the undefeated private secretary of Admiral Sir Reginald Hall.

'I'll go and see the C.N.S.', was the reply, and Ronald waited in the large room which had an aura indicative of the most secret devices of perhaps the greatest Intelligence Officer of all time.

Their Lordships of the Admiralty were engaged in conference, and the Chief of Naval Staff could not be consulted.

'Do it yourself, Claud,' said Ronald. 'You know the D.N.I. would not waste a moment, and time is precious.'

The signal was sent and Ronald walked over to the Home Office, 'In case any accident should occur,' he explained, for notwithstanding the fact that his own appointment carried the plenary powers of a competent military authority, it was desirable to cover his men, and to anticipate the possible opening of an enquiry.

Our distinguished Russian was already embarked off Leith, and settling down for his voyage to Archangel, when the officer in charge of the convoy presented himself, and with many apologies announced that he had just received an Admiralty signal instructing him not to sail until further orders. Inexplicable! He regretted, however, that in the circumstances he could neither offer hospitality, nor accept the responsibility of his passenger on board, who would therefore have to go ashore.

At a quiet hotel in Leith the Russian with his cumbersome canvas sack still chained to his wrist took coffee with two sympathising Englishmen who had travelled with him from London. They were indeed so attentive that towards 2 a.m. they entered his room and were immediately dazzled by a powerful electric torch in the hand of a very wide-awake figure sitting bolt upright in bed, whom they had expected to find unconscious. They made an unceremonious retreat, and were baffled.

The following morning a somewhat lame excuse was offered for this extraordinary nocturnal intrusion. The victim was becoming appeased again over coffee when a sudden strange feeling overcame him, followed by collapse, and finally by suspended animation. This time the correct mixture had been administered — the first had been mistakenly applied, and had proved innocuous because of food taken.

To detach and rush the sack to a waiting special train presented no difficulty, and was carried out according to prearranged plan. Ronald received it at King's Cross in the early hours of the morning, and drove to the Censor's Department. The Imperial Russian Seal was deftly removed, and committed to the care of an engraver who prepared a die in facsimile. Covent Garden was ransacked for an identical piece of cord, because Covent Garden was the nearest market at that hour, and before our Russian officer

recovered from his unaccountable seizure, the sack knotted, sealed and packed exactly as before was handcuffed to his wrist again, apparently untouched and untampered with. He found the convoy ready to sail, and proceeded on his journey at ease now in mind and body, but he never knew that two beautifully compiled volumes bound and tied respectively with green ribbon remained as a record of his misadventure, for they included photographic reproductions of every document contained in the official pouches, and even of his medals, decorations and Cross of St George which were there too.

The neutral Legations were exposed to every kind of imposition or device by which advantage could be taken of their courtesy and of their diplomatic privileges. They were consequently the cause of considerable apprehension. The use of their official bags in lieu of the ordinary post, and even the conveyance of them, by quite unofficial persons, provided an obvious danger. Yet sooner or later the rigidly correct attitude towards the country to which they were accredited would reassert itself, and thus from time to time these representatives of neutral countries barred their doors against such intruders.

But the Chinese Legation, with no deliberate intention, was apparently impervious to the ill-concealed anxiety of the British Intelligence Service, and unaware of the shameless usages to which its diplomatic bags were susceptible. The personnel were suave and courteous, but inarticulate. They maintained a dignified detachment in the most neutral sense, and pursued a placid course unperturbed seemingly by the war ravaging Europe. They remained unresponsive to blandishment or appeal. The only British subject among their number was one Sir John Brown, Councillor of Legation, who had held his appointment for the greater part of a long life, and for so many years that he had assimilated all the reserve and aloofness of his associates. He lived alone at the Langham Hotel, indeed he seemed to have no dependants, relatives, or even British acquaintances, so that every attempt to approach him on a social basis was met by the same bland courtesy and impenetrable composure which characterised his adopted colleagues.

After weeks of unrequited effort, however, he capitulated, dropped his guard, and allowed his interest to be aroused by a

lady, also resident at the Langham Hotel. She sought his opinion about a large jade pendant. This bauble had no particular significance and was without beauty to the eye of an average European. It measured perhaps four inches in length by three in width, was opaque, greyish in colour, and surrounded by a pierced ornamental margin. It was, in fact, a small tablet, bearing within its carved border-frame a number of hieroglyphics which apparently formed a Chinese inscription, and it was this writing which Sir John was invited to decipher.

He handled the jade with the care of a connoisseur, he studied it, pondered over it, and finally borrowed it for more technical etymological consideration. Some days passed and no solution was forthcoming, but the previous attitude was now reversed, for old Sir John sought out the lady every evening on his return to the Langham Hotel, and discoursed with much learning and without restraint upon historical epochs, dynasties and the varying cycles of Chinese civilisation. He questioned her closely as to the origin of her Chinese jade ornament, and she, only too anxious to assist him, undertook to collect detailed particulars from her relatives. The matter had now become absorbing, and was certainly making a considerable impression upon the aesthetic taste of the Chinese Legation. The pedagogues were admittedly perplexed and the illuminati foiled. They wanted to know everything about it, they proposed sending photographs with all available information to certain sages in China.

Meanwhile the owner revived parental memories, and delved among paper records, Sir John enquired, encouraged and expressed enthusiasm, so far as it lay in him so to do, and at last this is what he was told.

Somewhere early in the seventies of last century, a family relative had travelled the world round and brought home from China sundry examples of porcelain, fans and faience. Most of the former, it would seem, were made in Canton during the Ch'ien Lung famille Rose period especially for export to the European market, and were known in England as 'Chinese Lowestoft' and in the East as '*Compagnie des Indes*'. But included in the collection there had also been a massive, heavy urn of a simple but extremely dignified design, about which less was known. It was discovered, so the story went, in a province called Shensi. Apparently it had

laid buried for ages, in fact from some very remote period, and in that urn the tablet now in question had been found

'Most interesting, most interesting!' exclaimed Sir John 'You must come to the Legation so that a note may be made of these particulars Would it be possible to procure a photograph of the urn?'

No, not so easily as a sketch which the lady could easily make herself, and this was duly done She made an accurate pencil drawing showing the detail, the sections and dimensions She also made a coloured sketch presenting the picture and general effect of a massive bronze vase, only it was not bronze, but pottery, about fifteen inches high by twelve in diameter It was coated with a hard dark green iridescent glaze which gave an exact appearance of bronze, and upon a broad *repoussé* band encircling the shoulder were mythological figures riding dragons armed with bows, and hunting tigers At each side, and in even bolder relief, terminating each *semi-ceinture*, was a grotesque head holding in its mouth a large pendant ring, but this ring was also fixed or raised and not hanging free

Such in brief was the story, and with these particulars and sketches Sir John introduced her to the Chinese Legation where, after ceremonious overtures, she was received in no merely friendly way but with a cordiality which betokened a far greater sensibility to art than to war She recited her tale from prepared notes, and while a stenographer's record was being made this was amplified by interpolations from individual members of the Chinese Staff

Then genuine enthusiasm stood revealed Someone gazing at the sketches while following the description suddenly announced, 'But this dates from the Han Dynasty' (206 B C - A D 220) perhaps the period of Yuan Kuang It is similar to a specimen in the collection of Liu Hsi-Lai — does the vessel emit a ringing sound when tested with the finger-nail?' To which it was not possible at the moment to offer a reply

The whole dossier was forwarded later to China, while speculation added eloquence to normal Chinese reserve New contacts were accordingly made, new friendships formed, and the Chinese diplomatic bag became unaccountably inaccessible to outsiders

Some weeks later there came a most reasoned and learned dissertation upon the inscription on the tablet, the conclusion being that although the characters were decipherable the meaning remained obscure, and the specimen, it was thought, probably dated from that period covering four centuries between the Han and the T'ang dynasties — i.e. between A.D. 220 and 618, a period about which very little was known, for it was only after this latter date that China became the most civilised country on earth ‘An extremely interesting relic,’ was the verdict and so thought everyone concerned.

In those days (1917) the family firm of Messrs. Spink & Son, jewellers, silversmiths and numismatists, conducted their business in Piccadilly. They had not yet become, in addition, the well-known art dealers of to-day. They traded in the old-fashioned way, apprenticed their assistants in youth and pensioned them off in old age. Such a one was Mr. Baggallay, who had been there many years and was respected alike by employers and clients. To him one day went Ronald in search of a piece of jade suitable to carry an inscription, and his visit was not abortive. Mr. Baggallay knew an engraver capable of reproducing with exactitude certain unintelligible symbols which had been clearly and carefully drawn in Indian ink upon a card. These were to be reproduced in facsimile but engraved lightly. The whole was then to be burnished down most carefully with pumice-stone so that a patina over the work and edges of the plaque would preclude any probability of assessing its age.

The desired result was carried out to perfection — the *chinoiserie* — as Ronald called it — was complete. And if by some curious destiny, which seems to favour relics of mediaevalism or archaeology, that particular specimen should have found a place in some cherished collection, the present owner would surely be interested to have a correct rendering of the message which it bears.

From the works of a learned Persian author Ronald had selected a convenient passage. This was done into Syriac and then phonetically transposed, not translated, into the oldest dialectic Chinese characters procurable. In the Syriac it could therefore be read by a scholar familiar also with the Chinese dialect in question, and if the process be reversed, bringing the

writing back to Persian or modern English, the present owner will find the inscription upon his tablet reads as follows

'As you are worthy of being placed above all the treasures of the world, so you should know that between Heaven and Earth glory centres in your body'

Which was precisely the opinion cherished by the British Intelligence Service of the Chinese diplomatic bag!

The enormous publicity given to the Bolo and Caillaux trials, and the ramifications of German defeatist work, then laid bare, led to the suspicion that similar agents might be working in England. Although nothing of the kind was ever discovered, the situation was by no means impossible, and Ronald felt like one seated above a delay-action mine. It was a case of playing chess with an opposite number in Berlin. One had to study his psychology and think at least three moves ahead.

Several years after the War they met and dined together at the Ritz Hotel in London. They compared notes.

'Do you remember receiving a snapshot of me speaking to one of your agents in Piccadilly at the corner of Bolton Street?' Ronald asked him. And then, 'But did you know that a copy of it was returned to me from Berlin ten days afterwards?' and he drew it from his pocket.

'No,' replied his friend. 'But did you know that I had every available photograph of you, and of your brother officers together with the *curriculum vitae* of each career?' and he actually produced a photograph of Ronald aged only a few months, and sitting naked on his mother's knee, but draped in a lace flounce!

By 1917 the match had reached this stage of anxious uncertainty when Ronald was overjoyed to receive orders to proceed to Washington and take up an appointment as personal representative of the Director of Military Intelligence. He was accordingly relieved of his duties on April 14th and allowed three weeks in which to make himself more intimately conversant with the working machinery of every other branch of British Intelligence. Three days later Lord Beaverbrook suddenly expressed a wish to see him at the Hyde Park Hotel.

As Sir Max Aitkin, Canadian Government representative at the front, he had endeared himself to Ronald owing to the following

episode, and he has never failed him since. An evening gathering of rather hilarious Canadians. For some reason they were tickled to mirth about the black ribbon of St John of Jerusalem which Ronald was wearing. They had never seen it before. They became boisterous and manœuvred him into a corner, and at the moment when the position threatened to get out of hand because of the unseemly behaviour by non-commissioned ranks towards an officer, all of them being in uniform, Ronald caught Sir Max's eye watching him closely. Then he made an unexpected swoop into the group, extracted Ronald and drove him off in his car. It was a small matter, but it fixed Sir Max in his esteem.

The service he rendered him now was more personal, and in that regard infinitely valuable.

'Do you know why you are being sent to Washington?' he asked.

'Of course,' said Ronald with some pride, for the purpose of his going was clearly a matter for congratulation.

'Not at all,' insisted Lord Beaverbrook. 'You are being sent away because you are about to be involved in a society divorce case, and with your excellent record up to date, they don't want to risk a scandal!'

Ronald was staggered, pressed him for particulars, and when told that the information came from a member of the Army Council, and 'I thought you had better know' he obtained permission to quote what Lord Beaverbrook had told him, for in that case, he announced, it would be impossible for him to leave England.

He drove straight back to his Colonel.

'Did you know anything about this?' he asked, and was told, 'Oh, yes, but you mustn't take it so seriously.' He then telephoned the D M I, Sir George Macdonogh. 'May I see you at your earliest convenience upon a purely private matter, and therefore either at your Club or your house, or in mine?'

'Nonsense,' replied Sir George, 'come along here now, and we will suppose ourselves sitting in my club.'

Ronald told him the somewhat sketchy story, and asked Sir George if he knew with whom his name was being linked. Macdonogh said he had no idea at all. Then Ronald continued. 'Neither have I. You see, sir, this is the first I have heard of the subject, although it seems to be quite well known elsewhere. In

the circumstances I have no alternative to asking you to cancel your orders about my going to Washington, or else to disobey them, for it seems obvious that, short of active service, I cannot leave London'

The Director of Military Intelligence agreed. He cancelled his orders, and the appointment to Washington was not filled. Nothing further was heard of the divorce case, until eleven years later when we learned from an old brother officer of Ronald's that the lady opposite whom he had been cast to play was a friend of Violet's, but not even on Christian name terms with Ronald. In 1917 competition for success was fierce, but Ronald had done well and therefore he had enemies. It was a tribute.

He was now *degommé* and shelved again, only this time in the middle of the War which seemed almost more intolerable than before. Yet Providence had sheltered him too consistently in life for doubts to creep in now, and Stoicism is the mother of optimism. Moreover, he had two redoubtable friends. The one was Lord Beaverbrook, and the other was J. C. C. Davidson, Private Secretary to Mr Bonar Law.

The first-named was now Minister of Information (and Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster). On the 11th April, his deputy in the former department telegraphed, 'Could you come and see me to-morrow at 10 a.m. Buchan?' This was with a view to service in his Ministry.

Meanwhile, however, John Davidson had become active on Ronald's behalf. A great intimacy existed between them, and they were constantly together. The official day of each usually ended during the early hours of the next, and 'David,' who lived with his mother in Portland Place, frequently used Ronald's rooms in Shepherd Market as a half-way house. On his way home from the House of Commons, he would call there and more than once Ronald covered his sleeping figure with an eiderdown, and woke him up in time to reach his own home for breakfast.

A close friend and colleague of his was Sir John Baird (now Lord Stonehaven), who had been Parliamentary Private Secretary to Bonar Law, and had become the new Under Secretary of State to the newly formed Air Ministry. On the 19th April, Ronald dined with them both at David's Club. And on Wednesday, the 24th, Sir John Baird presented him to Major-General

Sykes, recalled from the Staff of the Supreme War Council at Versailles, to become the new Chief of the Air Staff

Thus only one day before the expiration of his three weeks' official leave, during which he completed his course of training with the whole Intelligence System, Ronald was appointed private secretary to the first Chief of Staff of the Royal Air Force

CHAPTER 16

1918

SYKES WAS A DOUR, DEFIANT CREATURE TO THOSE WHO NEITHER agreed with him nor understood him, but to others his courage and fortitude were a source of wonder and an incentive to loyalty and affection. His thin gaunt frame, as hard as iron, was the product of a spartan existence. Food occasionally was a necessity, but meals a nuisance, and he was singularly unaware of the time, excepting in the matter of appointments. Bodily sustenance was usually indicated when the day's work was done, in default of intervening nourishment, so he and Ronald often dined together — an almost inevitable sequel if they were to feed at all.

One night they were leaving the Air Ministry with this object. Sykes rang the lift bell. Ronald remarked, 'I don't think it is any use doing that, the lift stops at six.'

'But it's not six o'clock, is it?' asked Sykes.

'No,' replied Ronald. 'It's twenty past ten,' and they had to negotiate the stairs.

After dinner they would walk up and down Piccadilly together, regardless sometimes of the pouring rain, between Albany, where Sykes had chambers, and Shepherd Market, where Ronald lived.

Sykes was obviously scarcely human, yet Ronald thought him a paragon, and was devoted to him. And so far as Sykes could be devoted to anyone at that time, he appeared to reciprocate the feeling.

On the 28th of August they both started off to see the King of the Belgians at La Panne. The Earl of Athlone, head of the British Military Mission with the Belgian Army, had written that King Albert could see the Chief of the Air Staff at 2 p.m. and they were to lunch previously with the Belgian General Staff at Houthem.

The Channel service was suspended owing to very heavy weather, so instead of flying they crossed in the T B D *Panther*. They landed at Dunkirk, were met by Lord Athlone, lunched at Houthem, motored to La Panne, returned by the same T B D.

from Dunkirk, and after the most cinder-sifting progress towards the Isle of Wight — in order to locate the position of a drifting mine sighted on the outward trip — they came into Dover Harbour at full speed. The Navy knows no half measure.

They reached London just in time to catch the night train to Scotland, and in Edinburgh Sykes bethought himself for the first time of nature's requirements. Had Ronald not known him, and provided himself with a folding tin sandwich box containing eight water biscuits, they would have eaten nothing since twelve-thirty the previous day.

Another time they left Paris together for Villacoublay Aerodrome, only to find that the young officer in command there had been intimidated by two Members of Parliament (one was said to be Mr J H Thomas), and had parted with their two D H 4 machines.

'Has the car gone?' said Sykes. 'Then we must go by road and catch the boat.'

At Beauvais Ronald told him that they were forty minutes behind time.

'Tell Wilson [the chauffeur] to stop, and I will drive,' said Sykes, a man of little speech. The car was a very low Rolls coupe and Sykes an ex-Gordon Bennett racing expert!

'Will you sit behind with Wilson, or with me?' said Sykes, and Ronald replied, 'If I am going to be killed, I would rather be in front with you.'

Seventy-five miles from Paris there is a provincial village named St Saens, where the road takes a right-angled turn round a tall building which looks like a convent. Sykes took this corner at seventy-two mph by applying all his brakes and skidding the car. At that moment he found a stationary baker's cart at his side of the road, on the box seat of which sat a woman nursing a baby. Coming towards him was a despatch-rider on a motor-cycle, and the road was very narrow. Sykes had the option of killing the woman or the cyclist, so he instantly turned his car into the convent wall. The engine telescoped through the coupe, Wilson was catapulted through the roof, Sykes was shot out to starboard, Ronald to port, and not one of them was hurt! But when Ronald lay still, thinking both his legs were broken, and then got up to find they were not, Sykes merely remarked, 'Driving much too fast.'

meaning the despatch-rider They commandeered the next passing car and caught the boat

On yet a third occasion, also at Villacoublay, it was snowing very heavily on the entire air route to London Visibility about fifty yards Both engines running Sykes, preparing to get into his machine, handed his black despatch-box to Ronald and told him to go by train Ronald protested, but Sykes merely said that his papers were important, and to Ronald an order from his General was final

At one-twenty-five Sykes's machine taxied off and was immediately lost to view At ten-twenty that night nothing had been seen or heard of him The Dover Patrol was out searching the Channel, and priority telegrams and telephones were working to every likely station At ten-thirty-five he was reported down some few miles south-west of Ostend At 4 p m the next day he walked into an Air Council meeting apparently unaware of anything extraordinary

He had in fact been landed in an extremely small field, and actually dived under telegraph wires in the process He and his pilot Drew had then dismantled the more valuable equipment, and in heavy flying gear, and in severe winter weather had walked ten miles, carrying these articles to the coast, where they found a Coast Guard Station from which Sykes had crossed the Channel in a Belgian packet boat

On the 31st October there occurred a meeting which recalled the days of teams and tandems in Somerset Sykes and Ronald had to accompany Admiral His Highness Prince Yorihito of Hignashi Fushimi to Biggin Hill to witness an Air Force display As Ronald was walking along with one of the suite behind General Sykes and the Prince, the orderly officer came up and asked if he would speak to one of the groundsmen who had most particularly requested that this message might be given Ronald naturally consented, and, excusing himself in favour of another British officer, retired, and was immediately confronted by Charles Marchant, his old stud groom, now on the staff of Biggin Hill Aerodrome

- Someone else was told off to act as A D C to Sykes, and Ronald spent the rest of the afternoon in the married quarters having tea with his old friend

Sykes and his Private Secretary certainly were a quaint couple

Neither of them ever left the office without informing someone — the Resident Clerk failing anyone else — exactly where he could be found But every senior official did that in those war days

One Sunday night Ronald was sitting in his own room doing sentry-go over the telephone, when he received an urgent message General Sykes was dining in a private house, and although it was past eleven o'clock Ronald went to him immediately, and found him still there They left at once for the Air Ministry

For weeks, months, past, plans had been developing whereby General Trenchard's Independent Air Force in France should be provided with an alternative base at Bircham Newton Aerodrome on the East Coast, so that his heavy bombers could continue their course northward instead of having to return to their own base at Nancy in France, which operation had more than once provided disastrous results in bad weather Equally Bircham Newton would fly its long-distance bombers from Norfolk to Nancy, thus two Squadrons were to work interchangeably from the two extreme points of departure

The Norfolk detachment was commanded by Colonel R H Mulock, C B E , D S O (with Bar), a very distinguished Canadian officer with the unique record of being under threat of arrest and court-martial for desertion during the whole of the War On arrival in England with the first contingent of the Canadian Expeditionary Force, he had deliberately deserted and escaped from Salisbury Plain, because he became bored with routine drill and parades, and because he thought he had come over to fight, and not, as it seemed to him, to masquerade So he enlisted for a period of sixteen years in the Royal Naval Air Service, under Admiral Sueter who, claiming the privilege of the Senior Service, preserved him from arrest, and resisted his captors At the conclusion of hostilities General Sir Hugh Trenchard interviewed Mulock, and proposed that he should continue on the Headquarters Staff, but observing signs of passive resistance, he released his fighting friend, for 'After all,' said he, 'you were a necessary evil'

Another member of the Bircham Newton detachment was a man whom I personally admired enormously, Erskine Childers, famous to me for his incomparable book *The Riddle of the Sands* A dozen times a day he would appear in my room, for at that time my

personal duties in Air Intelligence concerned the distribution and the actual production of secret flying maps for such undertakings as this, and he, being the Officer at Bircham Newton charged with the provision of the required maps, took a very zealous part in their preparation

His drawn face topped with wiry grey hair worn *en brosse* would appear at a mysteriously low altitude round my door jamb. He would stare hard at nothing, and sometimes disappear without a word. It was obvious that his whole being was monopolised by the hazards in prospect. But his fatalistic attitude towards the great adventure captured my youthful imagination. 'We shall bomb Berlin, and then, casting all these maps overboard, we shall make for the East Coast of England, but I doubt if any of us will return.' It was stoicism worthy of an Arab in Kordofan, and wrung my heart, but I realise now that the proposed jettisoning of the maps was scarcely serious, but rather a reflection on their unwieldy size and weight. They were large-scale maps, each sheet covering a few square miles. They were applied to both sides of a very thick piece of cardboard, and there were hundreds of them! He chaffed me, for it was I who prepared and made them.

After the Armistice, he returned to Ireland and joined the Republican Army. He was discovered bearing arms, arrested in his own home, Glendalough House, Co. Wicklow, and he faced a firing squad in 1922. His final comment was very typical, 'Like lying down after a long day's work.'

The long and intricate preparation for the bombing of Berlin had reached finality, and the greatest excitement prevailed amongst the personnel at Bircham Newton, who were straining at the leash for the Chief of Staff's order releasing them on their first bombing raid. This terrific attack from north and south simultaneously upon Berlin and German objectives, was to commence on the morrow. Everyone concerned, and they were comparatively few, was keyed up to concert pitch, the bombardment would be stupendous, the onslaught staggering, and a little after midnight the Chief of the Air Staff walked into the Air Ministry with Ronald

Then followed a seance by telephone, consultations, confirmations, ciphers and codes. Davidson speaking for Bonar Law, Maurice Baring speaking for Trenchard, and at 5.30 a.m. Ronald

spoke to Bircham Newton I saw Colonel Mulock not many hours later at the Air Ministry, I have never seen a man so utterly crest-fallen At five-thirty on the morning of the eleventh of November, Ronald had conveyed to him the Chief of Staff's order that his bombing squadron would stand fast

It was Armistice Day

The anticlimax was almost stupefying in contrast to the high pitch of tension A dreadful flatness prevailed, and we individuals who had been working under such pressure in the hope of pulling off this great coup, stood about torn between a sense of frustration, and the intense relief which no one who lived through those last anxious months of the War could fail to understand

A gloomy silence reigned in the corridors of the Hotel Cecil My immediate Chief, Lieut-Commander Guy Ridgeway, R.N., wandered disconsolately into my room, gave me a part-worn sixpenny piece in which he had bored a hole 'To commemorate the occasion,' and wandered out again

At 11 a.m. the storm broke, and London went mad That night I attempted to walk down the Strand unaccompanied While endeavouring to shun the enthusiastic embraces of sundry Colonial soldiers, and to discourage offers of escort from complete strangers, a taxi labouring heavily against the human tide hove up like a solitary sail on the horizon It drew alongside, and I raised a beseeching face The door was forced open, and I was dragged in to find myself beside an American naval officer whom I had met for the first time at a dinner party the previous evening, and to whom I had barely spoken

In Trafalgar Square we passed two large bonfires, which were kept ablaze by the burning of taxicabs as fuel The place-boards had been torn from buses to use as twelve-foot torches and these were swung around in great circles, the casualties they caused adding to the general confusion

The Savoy at midnight was a wilderness, with its helpless staff contemplating complete wreckage of tables, chairs and linen In such manner does the human animal manifest its relief from pent-up anxiety and fear

I returned to the Cecil A senior Staff Officer, known to me only by sight, bounded up the steps of the main staircase, his face literally shone with radiance as he approached me And I, often

chidden for my aloofness, cried out spontaneously, 'What *can* have happened that you look so happy?'

'My wife had a son this morning,' was the proud reply, and he hurried on. Already the ranks were closing up.

Then to make things even more bewildering the Air Ministry moved, lock, stock and barrel, from the Hotel Cecil to its new permanent home in the Kingsway.

Everyone now was prepared for the forthcoming Peace Conference in Paris. Everybody was busy with this new-born combatant service of the Crown, the Royal Air Force, which would now be required to come into alignment with its two sister services in matters of ceremonial appropriate to peace conditions. New titles, new uniforms, had to be considered, and the status of its senior officers! Here was Major-General Sykes, the Chief of the Air Staff, with the local rank of Major-General,¹ meeting the Chief of the Naval Staff and the Chief of the Imperial General Staff on equal terms, but with no substantive position other than that of a junior officer transferred from a line Cavalry Regiment, the 15th Hussars. These matters had to be regularised.

It seemed clear that negotiations upon the terms of the Armistice would very shortly be taking place in France, and it was very desirable that the British Air Service should carry its proportionate weight with the Allied Air Services, a factor which had been noticeably lacking during the recent meetings at Versailles. The first step in this direction appeared to be that the Chief of the Air Staff should be more closely related in rank to the First Sea Lord and to the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, since foreigners recognise the importance attaching to a particular Service by the rank and status which a country bestows upon its representatives.

¹ General Sykes regarded these matters as of such little personal importance that he neglected them completely in his own case. On the 15th February, 1922, the King held a levee at St James's Palace. Ronald was there on duty in attendance on H R H The Duke of York. Members of the Royal Family stood on the King's left, and members of the Staff on his right. Ronald was therefore standing with Admiral Sir Stanley Colville and Air Marshal Sir Hugh Trenchard, both Aides de Camp to the King. Someone, dressed in Civilian Court Dress was announced and advanced towards the King. Isn't that Sykes?" asked Sir Stanley Colville. "Yes" replied Sir Hugh Trenchard — Why isn't he in uniform then?" Because," said Trenchard, "he hasn't got one."

The initiative must come of course from Lord Weir, the Secretary of State for Air, and this was very wisely inspired by a letter in the above sense addressed to him on the eighteenth of November by J C C Davidson. He ventured to say in addition that a conversation with Lord Stamfordham in this connection convinced him that a submission to the King might quite properly be made — if Lord Weir found himself so disposed — that General Sykes be created a Knight Commander of the Bath. This honour was accordingly conferred upon him in the New Year List of 1919.

Immediately after the Armistice on Saturday the 23rd of November, the King held a Review, in Hyde Park, of ex-Service Silver Badge men who had fought in the War. He was of course attended by a considerable number of Staff officers in addition to his personal and Household staff. It was a mounted parade and the Air Ministry was represented by the Chief of the Air Staff, General Sykes, and his principal staff officer Ronald, both ex-cavalry officers. As they were passing Marlborough House on the way to Buckingham Palace, General Sykes asked Ronald to pull down the blinds of his car so that he might put on his spurs. His horse-sense rebelled, said Ronald, against this application of spurs to the astral plane.

The whole cavalcade mounted in the inner courtyard of Buckingham Palace, and rode out with the King amidst tremendous cheering to meet the Queen and Queen Alexandra, who were to join them in a semi-state landau at the top of Constitution Hill, at which point General Sykes and Ronald were detailed to ride one on each side of their carriage. This was a compliment to the new Royal Air Force and a concession to its new pale blue uniform which was being tried out for the first time in public on this occasion.

In this formation, then, the procession entered the Park, the King accompanied by the Prince of Wales with his personal A D C's and followed by the carriage of the two Queens escorted by the two R A F officers. Then a most unprecedented demonstration occurred. As the King was riding down the lines, followed by the whole retinue and carriages, the ex-service men broke their ranks, the King's hand was seized and violently pump-handled. Before anyone could intervene a swarming mass of humanity had

completely isolated the King, surrounded the Prince of Wales, and segregated the carriage containing the two Queens. Ronald forced his charger's head into Queen Alexandra's lap so that she actually held its nose (it had a pink nose) between her white-gloved hands, while he successfully barred attempts to climb into her carriage. General Sykes was doing the same on Queen Mary's side, and for several minutes there seemed every likelihood of an accident owing to the terrific pressure of the crowd. Happily, however, nothing of the sort occurred, no one was hurt, and after an anxious interval of time during which perfect good humour prevailed, although any forward movement was absolutely impossible, the Mounted Police gained control and made an opening. The procession then resumed its dignified progress and returned to Buckingham Palace.

Until then, the King had appeared to enjoy this unusual experience of swaying about as in a colossal football scrum, but once beyond the public gaze he expressed himself in no measured terms, and was indeed extremely angry.

A month later, just after Christmas, three officers went over to Paris to make preparation for the arrival of the delegations representing their respective Services at the forthcoming Peace Conference. They were Captain Hotham of the Admiralty, Colonel Kisch of the War Office, and Ronald of the Air Ministry. Colonel Kisch was afterwards a member of the Polish Ukrainian Armistice Committee and subsequently head of the Zionist Organisation in Jerusalem. These three arrived together at the Majestic Hotel and were immediately faced with apparently baffling problems of a technical and domestic nature. In the first place the demands upon accommodation were hopelessly in excess of the premises available, and although the Majestic was one of the largest hotels in Paris, it provided no margin of space for the Indian and Imperial Delegates.

On the 9th January the question was still unsolved. Almost next door to the Majestic, the Hotel du Perouse housed R.A.F.H.Q. and that of the Ministry of Munitions. Ronald was now the representative of the Air Ministry in Paris, G.S.O.1 and a delegate designate to the Conference. He knew therefore that the R.A.F.H.Q. was about to be demobilised, and was able to offer their accommodation to Lord Hardinge, the British Ambassador. Lord

Hardinge accepted gladly, and after communicating with England, eventually was able to remove the Ministry of Munitions also, to make way for the homeless delegates. He was extremely grateful to Ronald on personal and official grounds and expressed himself accordingly to the Air Council.

The necessary arrangements were made, and provided one of the first steps for the opening of the Paris Peace Conference on the 13th January 1919, but in addition to these extraneous considerations, and to his primary duties as Private Secretary to the Chief of Air Staff, Ronald was also a member of the Intelligence Branch of the R A F Delegation in Paris, and a member of the Intelligence Department in London. Furthermore, he was detailed to organise the Communication Squadron, by which the R A F were to maintain regular contact throughout the Conference between London and Paris, and to this end the first step was to secure an aerodrome near Paris, with the assistance of the French Government. Here renewed difficulties presented themselves, and extortionate prices were suggested. It was only by the judicious use of a third party that negotiations were satisfactorily concluded, and that Villacoublay Aerodrome was eventually secured at a reasonable cost for His Majesty's Government. During these hectic preliminaries Ronald was flying to and fro, sometimes crossing the Channel three times in a day, and at a later date General Sykes wrote officially of him in this connection:

'This Officer has served under me since April 1918, and throughout as my Private Secretary on the Air Section of the British Delegation at the Peace Conference Paris. His efforts contributed largely to the installation of the Air Section in Paris and of the Communication Squadron in connection with the British Delegation. He also acted as Intelligence Officer to the Air Section until February 1919. His untiring tact, zeal, loyalty, and knowledge have been of the greatest possible assistance to me in both Paris and in London.'

There were many coincidences, too, during this international assemblage. One rainy afternoon in Paris, Ronald was waiting for his car. The Prime Minister of Poland stood by his side, also waiting. By way of diversion from the complexities of the Peace Conference, Ronald reminded him of very different surroundings.

long ago, and recalled how, as a child, he watched the great Maestro Paderewski break two wires in his mother's Ronisch piano. The Prime Minister Paderewski gazed at him in astonishment, and exclaimed, '*Mais ce n'est pourtant pas le même petit Ronald?*'

IN VIEW OF THE VERY SEVERE WEATHER OF 1918-19, AND THE enormous demands made upon the Communication Squadron flying at all times between Paris and London, there were astonishingly few accidents. Only one machine was lost (in the Channel with its pilot and a Scandinavian passenger named Amundsen) while flying blind in heavy snow, and trying to fix its position off Gris-Nez. Otherwise no civilian failed to reach his destination, and although a good deal of hazardous flying was done by Air Ministry officials, there was, with this one exception, no serious mishap. Forced landings occurred and fortunate escapes, due more to weather conditions than to lack of experience in Civil Aviation, for the pilots of this Squadron were flying as on active service, and they were all officers with magnificent fighting records.

The first official flight, however, provided an example of these minor mishaps. Ronald left Paris with despatches at nine-thirty. 'Very bumpy, clouds thick and low, heavy squalls to Channel, increasing to full gale force half-way over.' Flying at 120 m.p.h. were only making about thirty. Impossible to land on coast either above or below (bad visibility and force of wind). So they turned back and landed in nine minutes at Hesdin, Headquarters of the 55th Squadron in France. Took off again, wind altogether too heavy, smashed under plane when landing, and Ronald rode in a side-car to Boulogne, caught the boat, had a very rough passage in a heavy gale, and thus crossed the Channel three times in less than two and a half hours.

A fortnight later he left Hendon Aerodrome at one-forty-five in quite good weather. 'Hazy, wind S.W. 15 m.p.h. at 2,000 feet. Crossed Channel from Lympne to Gris-Nez. Too easterly a course on account of bad visibility. Thence to Abbeville, visibility worse. Missed Beauvais altogether.' And at three-fifty-five, feeling sure he was too easterly, Ronald told his pilot to land, which he did in a large stubble field, found that he was about twenty-five miles

east-south-east of Paris, 'sun sinking, about half an hour of light, and half an hour of petrol, gave pilot course west-north-west to pick up the Seine and follow it to Villacoublay Aerodrome, then took off again' It was now distinctly foggy and getting dark rapidly

'When I found after nearly three hours' flying from the start,' wrote Ronald, 'that we were flying over Paris houses heading direct for the Eiffel Tower, I told Shepherd to turn back and land at the first opportunity'

They made a perfect landing at 4.35 p.m. in the centre of a thickly populated area near the Porte Maillot on to an anti-aircraft station, 'Poste de defense contre Avions de Courbevoie,' just as their petrol ran out. Here they were most properly arrested at once by the Warrant Officer in charge, whose action Ronald immediately commended by telephone when reporting his plight to the French War Office.

The machine had to be dismantled as it was impossible to take off again in so restricted a space.

The only really serious crash occurred when General Sykes was leaving Kenley Aerodrome for Paris. Ronald stood by watching him taxi up the ground and take off. Captain Knott, his pilot, left the ground, attempted a climbing turn with insufficient flying speed, side-slipped, and crashed on to the Aerodrome. Immediately every emergency gang was in motion. Ambulance, fire equipment, and groundsmen were motoring across at top speed, for the machine should have burst into flames at once. But long before anyone could reach them, the astonishing sight of Sykes standing completely clear of the wreckage with the limp body of Captain Knott in his arms mystified everyone. They had both been strapped in, therefore Sykes had first to get himself free, climb out of his own cockpit into the forward seat, not only get the unconscious Knott clear of his harness, but also of two steel struts which had completely impaled his body, and then jump to the ground with him from a height of at least nine feet. All this he had done in a matter of seconds, believing that they must both be enveloped in flaming petrol instantly.

It seems a curious reflection that a man of such courageous presence of mind should be sufficiently shy to draw down the blinds of his car before putting on spurs because he was wearing an Air Force uniform.

Sykes was blinded, but fortunately in time, with expert treatment, recovered his sight Knott was killed

Four days later, on the 7th May, Ronald left Hounslow at 12.25 and flew to Castle Bromwich as the representative of Major-General Sir Frederick Sykes, with General Smyth Osborn representing the Secretary of State, and General R. M. Groves representing the Under-Secretary of State. At 2 p.m. they attended Captain Knott's funeral service at Sutton Coldfield.

But Sykes had little reverence for ritual and was impatient of superficialities, as they seemed to him. The Almighty could be conferred with at any time or place, irrespective of conventional appointments. The fashioning of his vast precepts made no allowance for lesser minds. He therefore defied popularity even at a bargain price and occasionally retarded both general and personal progress by rejecting concessions to minor proposals.

When Ronald had experienced a series of really rough flying passages, and finally emerged upside down, without knowing it, from a dense black cloud over the Channel, he wrote a memorandum to his diplomatic colleague in Paris, submitting that King's Foreign Service Messengers would no doubt be required to travel by air in future, and in all weathers, but this was scarcely a duty to be assigned to the inexperienced. The tentative suggestion followed that for these reasons such appointments might be considered appropriate to Air Force officers. An official communication from the Foreign Office was accordingly received by the Air Ministry enclosing a copy of this memorandum. It stated that as Lord Curzon, the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, entirely concurred in the views expressed therein the writer was to request that should there be no objection, the names of two officers to be selected by the Air Ministry for this duty should be communicated to the Foreign Office in order that the formal letters of appointment and the customary badge of the King's Foreign Service Messengers — the silver greyhound — might be issued without further delay.

No action was taken in the matter, and the invitation to an adolescent Department of State which by its modern methods could have revitalised a picturesque and traditional old-time service initiated by King Charles II, thus went by default.

General Sykes had flying sense to a degree of genius, but he had

no volatile imagination and he sometimes missed an opportunity because, for him, it was distorted by its own transparency

About half-past six on the 12th of February he had flown from Paris with Ronald and arrived at the Air Ministry to find a major issue awaiting him which reconstructed the Air Council, and re-orientated his own Department. The Government had decided, and a letter from the Secretary of State, now Winston Churchill, explained that Civil Aviation presented a problem the future magnitude of which could not be assessed. Departmental control, organisation and supervision were essential, particularly during the Sessions of the Peace Conference. While it was desirable that General Sykes should continue to lead the Air Delegation in Paris until the close of the Congress it was equally important that he should accept the prospective appointment of 'Comptroller General of Civil Aviation.'

This meant that his office of Chief of the Air Staff would in due course lapse, that terminating his career as a combatant officer he would become a Civil Servant, and that the same conditions must govern the transfer of every R A F officer from the old to the new Department.

The considerations involved, both private and official, could not be disposed of in a moment, so they went back to Albany, Sykes and Ronald, to swallow the pill and await its effect! They sat up doing this for the rest of the night.

Thus the Wheel of Destiny revolved once more. The new Department was set up and brought additional contacts, wider scope and greater responsibilities but the delegation from the Air Ministry to Paris still remained under the leadership of General Sykes and its members still retained their uniform until the termination of the Peace Conference at the end of June. And when in Paris Ronald continued to dine at the Majestic Hotel with Sir William Orpen, or more often with his fellow recluse, Colonel T E Lawrence.

The following month, March 1919, a fine old French soldier came to England on a diplomatic mission, and Ronald was officially attached to him during his visit. General Pau was a rugged type of the old school, a fierce ruthless disciplinarian, but a courteous, gentle and charming friend. Having lost his right arm, this battle-scarred old warrior carried an empty sleeve. Half

measures made no appeal to him, so he applied his philosophy to the Diplomatic Service as a whole, and to every form of 'spit and polish'. He hated the diplomats *de carrière*, and described them as Carpet Knights with no head for the heights to which they aspire, and unable to trace their descent 'lorsqu'ils sont en train de culbuter'.

It was this spartan aspect of the duties incumbent upon officialdom which produced from his pen a terrific diatribe on the Rumanian Royal Family and its Corps Diplomatique during the early days of the War. It sent Colonel C. B. Thomson (subsequently Lord Thomson, Secretary of State for Air in the first Labour Government) to our Legation at Bucharest, General Piu having urged in a moment of satirical expansion that it would be advantageous if Great Britain could be induced to appoint her 'best looking' Military Attaché to Rumania as security for Allied interests!

He sent Ronald his photograph 'Avec mon bien affectueux souvenir,' and he died in 1932 at the age of 83.

For months past General Sykes had been working upon a plan for reconstructing the Royal Air Force on a peace basis in preparation for the probable armistice, and when the moment arrived every provision had been made so meticulously that the reorganisation took effect almost automatically and left us with the finest Air Force in the World.¹ It was for this reason that the focus was adjusted from the combatant force to the control of Civil Aviation, so as to harness the latter both as a new commercial industry in general, and as a foster-mother to the R.A.F. in particular.

The London-Paris air route had already been established by the

¹ Two years later, on the 25th of January, 1921, Air Marshal Sir Hugh Trenchard, Chief of the Air Staff, and Major General Sir Frederick Sykes, Comptroller General of Civil Aviation, appeared as witnesses before a Committee presided over by Mr Bonar Law, to take evidence upon the question of Capital Ships.

This was preparatory to the Washington Conference attended in November of that year by Mr Balfour's Mission of Empire delegations, and designed to bring about limitations of Naval Armaments.

Owing to the policy of rigorous economy decided upon by His Majesty's Government Sykes's organisation of a ready made peace time Royal Air Force based upon existing material had been scrapped. And it transpired during the enquiries of the above-mentioned Capital Ship Committee that for every fighting machine we could put into the air, France, for example, had nine.

Communication Squadron operating systematically during the Peace Conference, although it only developed into a commercial proposition open to the public five years later when in April 1924 four British firms amalgamated, and Imperial Airways flew a regular daily service between London and Paris. Meanwhile, foreign markets were watching us closely and awaiting developments. Imperial lines of communication were considered and prepared, demonstration flights were planned, and both Ronald and I were closely concerned — he from the administrative and I from the map-section side.

Certain recommendations made by the officer in charge of the first of these flights, carried out under Air Ministry direction, to Madrid, throw light upon the experience which made for modern comfort and speed in air travel. He reported (a) Similar flights should not be advertised before the route has been reconnoitred (b) The number of landings should be reduced to a minimum owing to the time wasted in default of preparatory organisation (c) For long-distance work the seating accommodation (of machines) requires considerable improvement (d) The misuse of the landing T to indicate a landing spot (instead of the direction of the wind as intended) should be discontinued.

The success of this flight was in fact only achieved by excellent piloting, and affords a striking example of pioneer work by a combination of four machines, namely

- 1 Handley Page V/1500, carrying 2 pilots, 1 navigator and a crew of 3
- 2 De Haviland 4, carrying 1 pilot and 1 observer
- 3 De Haviland 4, carrying 1 pilot and 1 observer
- 4 Bristol fighter, carrying 1 pilot and 1 observer

No 1 machine was to leave from Manston, and fly direct to Madrid. The other three were to leave from Biggin Hill, and the date of departure was provisionally fixed for the 1st of May (1919). Madrid reported unsuitable weather on that date, so the flight was postponed, but No 1 machine started on the 6th, meeting bad weather over the Pyrenees, landed at Biarritz, and proceeded the next day to Pau for repair to propellers damaged by hail.

On the 7th, after a delay of several hours for fog to clear, the remaining three machines started. They arrived separately at Tours and after much further delay went on to Pau, but landed

too late to reach Madrid the same day, particularly as an exhaust pipe of No 2 machine was falling off and the manifold had burst

Next day the three smaller machines left Pau, taking a direct course for San Sebastian. No 2 found thick fog coming in from the sea towards the mountains and rapidly enveloping San Sebastian. After searching for a clear patch at heights up to 7,000 feet the pilot turned back from the neighbourhood of Tolosa and climbed over the fog barrier to 15,000 feet. Finding the coast again, he came down to 900 feet over San Sebastian and followed the main road to Tolosa. Before reaching Andoaja, however, thundery weather and thick black fog turned him back towards Pau. Near Hendaye the oil pressure began to drop, so he flew via Biyonne in case of a forced landing and reached Pau as the oil pressure dropped from 20 lb to zero.

The position of the machines was now, Nos 1 and 2 at Pau, No 3 at Hendaye with oil trouble, and No 4 forced down by weather at San Sebastian.

On the 8th the Handley Page left at midday but returned at 2.30 with propellers again damaged by hail. The weather was found hopeless near the coast by reason of heavy rain and thunderstorms. No 4 reached Vittoria and left for Madrid, but landed near Soria with magneto trouble.

On the 9th, Nos 1 and 2 machines left Pau and climbed to 8,000 feet above the clouds of dense wet mist and heavy hail, then the airspeed indicator of No 2 became useless and began to work backwards, leaving the compass as the only instrument by which a horizon could be obtained, the engine also became irregular. At 10,000 feet there was no sign of the sky, and at 7,000 feet no sign of the ground, so a course was set for returning to Pau, but coming out of a cloud near Calhorra there was suddenly good visibility. Owing to the wind his speed over the ground would scarcely carry him to Madrid with the supply of petrol running low. The situation was precarious. Just east of Madrid the second main tank gave out, but he landed at Cuatros Vientos with barely two gallons left in the gravity tank, after three and three-quarter hours' flying.

The fact, however, that all four machines arrived at the aerodrome in time for an inspection by the General commanding the Spanish Flying Corps, and that a successful formation flight was

subsequently made round Madrid, carrying Spanish officers and officials as passengers, made up in some measure for the failure to complete the journey from England in one day. But the chance of doing better on the return flight, so as to minimise this failure, could only be hoped for by separating the machines and by spreading the attempt over different days. It was accordingly made known that while the departure of the three machines would be postponed in order to let the officers concerned take advantage of official invitations, No 2 would return to England on the 12th.

Another, and a very cogent, reason was that No 2 was the only machine likely to succeed on the return journey, because No 3 had become unserviceable with a bad knock, and a big end gone as a result of the previous oil trouble, No 4 required three stops to pick up petrol, and the Handley Page would be equally delayed and additionally handicapped by the existing weather conditions.

At 6.15 therefore on the morning of the 12th the return journey commenced in comparatively good weather. At 9.30 No 2 machine landed at Pau and, leaving at 11.45, arrived at Tours three hours later. A front outside flying wire had pulled through the top wiring plate when going through a bumpy layer of clouds. So, with the loose end tied to the leading wire to prevent flapping, the flight was resumed at over 4,000 feet to avoid straining the machine in cloud bumps. As observation of the ground was thus impossible, a course was set for Havre and, passing over Fecamp in a clear patch, Kenley was reached safely excepting for obvious signs of a burst valve. A hazardous landing was made in obedience to the landing T which had been placed in exactly the wrong wind direction, though fortunately the undercarriage stood the strain of a quick turn on rough ground.

The actual flying time from Madrid to Kenley was eight hours and forty minutes and the flight was undertaken with machines which would be condemned as unsafe by modern regulations, which no present-day pilot would be allowed to take up, but which were flown by intrepid and completely imperturbable war-time pilots to demonstrate the excellence of British products.

Preparations were now well advanced for the first Imperial Air route flight to Australia, a far more ambitious demonstration. This necessitated negotiation with the Government of Holland for permission to organise landing arrangements in the Dutch East

Indies, and afforded an opportunity for a small spectacular flight to Amsterdam. In June Ronald came to me and said he wanted a chart of the water approach to Amsterdam and maps showing the land route across Holland. The maps presented no very great problem, but the chart did. No such chart of large enough scale existed. Efforts to obtain one from every and any source proved unsuccessful, and finally I went to the British Museum and found the very thing, but at this distance of time I cannot remember what country produced it, or indeed, if it was even up to date, I suspect not. Still it was a large-scale chart of the water approach to Amsterdam, and I was eventually able to give Ronald a buff slip showing a magnetic bearing to Amsterdam from Felixstowe, and a rough but accurate sketch in blue and red pencil to a scale of one and a half miles to an inch, of the fort in the Zuyder Zee, of the breakwater and locks of the canal to Amsterdam, the spot where the seaplanes should land on the water, and of two buoys, a couple of miles farther west, moored off the Air Station of Schellingwond where they should fetch up. With this buff slip as their only chart, two seaplanes left Felixstowe on the 14th July after announcing that they would arrive at 3 p.m.

The weather conditions were excellent but for no visibility, owing to a thick sea mist covering the whole of the North Sea. They flew above this, however, and its only result was favourable, for the population of Amsterdam had turned out in dense masses to witness the arrival, and were waiting in the fog expecting to be disappointed, because an official bulletin, announcing an inevitable postponement, had been widely circulated by the Acroclub Royale des Pays Bas. The landing, or arrival, was therefore quite dramatic, for, having kept their course and run their distance, they came down out of the 'blue,' found themselves over Scheveningen well ahead of time, so cruised around out of sight, out of hearing, and struck the water simultaneously out of the fog at Schellingwond, Amsterdam, one machine exactly in the wake of the other as the clock struck three. Even the roar of their engines failed to drown the cheering of the multitude who scarcely saw them in the mist, but the official photographs show the arrival exactly, and record a most brilliant piece of propaganda.

Then a curious thing happened. Ronald's first action, while picking up and making the buoys, was to release two pigeons

announcing their arrival — this also is shown in the photographs, these pigeons were back at the Air Ministry so quickly that I actually knew the result before I expected that it could have been achieved The room of the officer responsible for signals at the Air Ministry, Colonel Waley Cohen, was almost next to mine

This preliminary success provided an excellent opening gambit for the diplomatic conversations to follow, but Ronald at once made contact with his old school colleague Malcolm Robertson, at that time our Minister at The Hague, but formerly in 'Old Dick's' House at Marlborough He attired himself in the official silk hat and frock coat, and together they visited the Dutch Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs and the several other Ministers concerned Everything was thus satisfactorily concluded and Ronald was able to leave again on the Wednesday, bringing with him the first diplomatic bag to cross the North Sea by air

After passing over The Hague and dipping their obeisance to the British Legation, they followed the coast-line to the southward in order to face the true head wind, then steered a 285° westerly course and landed at Felixstowe in two and three-quarter hours

As this performance of the British flying boats had so greatly impressed the Dutch it was thought desirable to follow it up by a display of British efficiency at the forthcoming Amsterdam Aircraft Exhibition, especially as the Germans were making strenuous efforts to capture the Dutch aviation trade A formation of five flying boats with eleven officers, led by General Sykes, accordingly carried our reputation a stage further by arriving with perfect precision at the Dutch Naval Air station on August 12th to attend the official opening of the exhibition The only failure in staff work arose on removing their flying helmets, when it was discovered that no provision had been made for the smoothing of ruffled hair Fortunately, however, Ronald, who is always at his best in an emergency, produced a small pocket comb which did duty for each individual, and the whole contingent paraded forth-with almost decently coifed

Three months later, on the 12th November, a Vickers-Vimy-Rolls bomber left England on the first Australian flight, thus inaugurating the long-distance world air routes of the future The pilots were Captain Ross Smith, M C , D F C , A F C , and his brother Keith, who were both subsequently knighted



DIRECTIONAL CHART PREPARED BY THE AUTHOR AND USED FOR THE FIRST
OFFICIAL FLIGHT TO AMSTERDAM

We were now seriously beginning to feel the reality of our own excellence as an air-minded nation, and our own constructive ability to produce not only the best war weapon, but the best vehicle to meet commercial requirements in the new element British aircraft constructors were reviving in civil commercial aircraft the old reputation of the Merchant Service, and just as the latter produced the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve long before it was recognised by that title, so would commercial pilots, it was thought, provide a solid reserve behind any demands which might be made by the Royal Air Force

For the moment we were ahead of all the Allies as universal providers which means that we led the world, for the capacity of production by the Central Powers had been throttled down by Treaty and poverty, the neutral States had permitted us literally to gain a flying start, and our allies were starved by the privations of war. Thus our salesmanship seemed to be merely a question of psychology, but although the Englishman may be a good shop-keeper he is neither a good salesman nor a good metaphysician, for the opportunity was there as certainly as it was lost.

In any case, foreign markets smiled upon us not because they liked us but because of the service we might render them. Foreign decorations were lavishly sprinkled among us, compliments and invitations were showered upon us, and the King of Spain wanted to see General Sykes. In December he set out for Madrid with Ronald.

At Paris they were stopped by the Spanish Court. Something had occurred which must postpone the visit, and in Paris they waited.

When removed from a constructive policy, a man of Sykes' complicated character was not easy to entertain, and Ronald became apprehensive. He consulted an extremely rich friend. What was he to do if they were marooned in Paris over Christmas? 'Give me two hours,' said his friend, 'and I will give you a programme,' and it came. On at least three consecutive mornings they returned to the Ritz Hotel with barely sufficient time for bath and breakfast before being hurried again into a car — '*La voiture attend ces Messieurs*'.

The indefatigable General appears to have stood up fairly well to the exacting demands and to the banqueting which he was

expected to enjoy in duplicate, if not in triplicate — on Christmas Eve, for example, they saw ‘Le Bonheur de la Femme’ at the Capucines, they saw the Russian dances of Madame Pavlova at the Theatre Champs Elysees, followed by the official Russian Ballet at the Opera House. They were subsequently hustled out of the Abbaye de Thelème, after supper, and just before it was ransacked by the police, or some other organised force, who removed the remaining clientele in municipal dust carts, and they danced at the Ritz until breakfast time — but even Sykes showed symptoms at last of having seen much and heard more, so, without knowing which day after Christmas it was, they succumbed to nostalgia and returned on the 27th.

Early in the New Year they started again, but this time with greater certainty of success. On Sunday the 18th of January they arrived at the Ritz in Madrid and received at lunch the General Exchaque, Director of Military Aviation, Colonel Soriano, the Sub-Director, Major Fernandez and Major Herrara, in charge respectively of workshops and instruments at the Aerodromes of Cuatros Vientos. That evening they dined at the British Embassy. Sir Esmé Howard was calling them birds of passage at the moment when the game on his own dinner table seemed to him equally elusive.

‘*Vraiment*,’ said he to his wife, Lady Isabella, ‘*ce volatile est trop evasif!*’

Seated at a desk in his study — so small that it was probably inconvenient for a deputation of more than three persons — King Alfonso received General Sykes, accompanied by Ronald, on the 20th. The purpose of this audience was ostensibly to discover at which point British and Spanish aviation joined interests, but beyond a cursory survey of the lavish expenditure upon Spanish aerodromes out of the insufficiency of public funds voted, on which point His Majesty remarked that he would rather have better machines and less extravagant officers’ messes, the King immediately referred to certain decorations which he had wished to confer upon British officers concerned with the recent flight from England.

He had received, he said, a most insulting stereotyped communication from the English Foreign Office explaining the restricted permission with which his decorations might be accepted. He became extremely vituperative, and speaking English as he

does with the most unexpected but apt expletives, he swore that never again would he offer anything to an Englishman. He then spoke with great bitterness of England's attitude during the War towards neutral powers in general and Spain in particular. He had been placed in an extremely invidious position, he said, and had never been able to get any assurance as to the policy of Great Britain in the event of a rupture between Spain and Germany. A false decision on his part might have produced incalculable consequences inimical to the Allies. He was given no offer of assistance whatever in respect of the internal troubles which would assuredly beset his country if she declared against the Central Powers, or as to the protection of Spanish ports against enemy attack. Nor was Great Britain prepared to contribute any sympathetic consideration to the Spanish position in Morocco, in return for Spanish co-operation with the Allies. Great Britain, according to His Majesty, had behaved in a very cavalier fashion towards Spain during the war, and her attitude in the post-war period intensified his censure. He condemned most forcefully the friendly approach of Britain towards neutrals with the exception of Spain, who had been more helpful than anyone and had received less thanks. He spoke of Bolshevik activities. Our policy in Russia he considered deplorable. Spain had not been consulted. The Russian Army, he knew, comprised two million men, three thousand German officers and fifty thousand Russian officers of the old army. He compared the state of Ireland with that of Barcelona where a hundred and sixty murders had recently been committed, the funds behind both troubles, he said, probably came from one source, via Victoria Street in London. His Majesty then reverted to Morocco, Tangier and Gibraltar. The latter was obsolete and useless as a fortress, but should be embodied in an Anglo-Spanish design for the protection of the Mediterranean, while Great Britain's recognition of the Spanish claim to Tangier would complete the picture. The fact that Spain enjoyed no strategic *locus standi* on either side of the Straits involved a very real danger to Britain, and an extreme cause of resentment in Spain.

As General Sykes was neither a Minister nor a representative of His Majesty's Government, but merely the head of a Department, it seems strange that King Alfonso should have lectured him at great length upon these subjects, for the audience lasted well over

an hour It is perhaps a peculiarity of some great men to impose upon their listeners as from the pulpit, the stage, or the Treasury Bench, rather than to accommodate their discourse

I have heard a Prime Minister declaim in the most oracular manner about his own personal attributes to a room unoccupied by any person other than myself

Ronald maintains, though I have never heard or seen it stated elsewhere, that King Alfonso was genuinely embittered and mortified by the German action at The Hague Conference of 1907 Under combined pressure of himself and Leopold II of Belgium, a decision was within an ace of being reached in favour of compulsory arbitration in international disagreements At this point the Kaiser withdrew his delegates and destroyed the whole structure Whether this is so or not, King Alfonso was certainly in a very censorious frame of mind Then suddenly he threw off officialdom and became a wholly human person The audience ended

The monarch was now transformed into the gay polo-playing soldier, a familiar figure on occasions at Worcester Park and Hurlingham His Secretary and Ronald's friend, Exemo Senor Don Emilio Torres, joined them, and together they all four went off to visit the Royal Armoury — the most wonderful collection in the world The King, a perfect host and guide, explained that this enormous *salle d'armes* was really the equivalent of a more modern harness room It was not a museum excepting by the passage of time, because its use for the proper maintenance of the Household armour had never been discontinued Its contents comprised not only the complete outfit of armoured clothing in use by the men, women (occasionally) and horses, from earliest times, including a complete suit of damascened steel worn by a greyhound, but afforded the only comprehensive example in existence of so vast a wardrobe covering every period

That night they attended a Court Reception The ceremonial here was peculiar to the Court of Madrid On one side of a long gallery the Corps Diplomatique awaited the Royal entry, each foreign Ambassador or Minister stood at the head of a kind of cubicle with those whom he wished to present Sykes, Ronald and Captain Harvey, the British Naval Attaché, stood behind Sir Esme Howard, our Ambassador The Royal Party passed slowly along

the gallery, chatting with ceremonial ease to each group, which then fell in behind and followed into the Throne Room. Here the rather tedious Court Reception was held, and afterwards the Corps Diplomatique with its proteges again followed the Royal Party to supper, apart from those less privileged who were entertained separately. The King now relaxed again, and became democratic to a degree which clearly embarrassed some of the more rigid devotees of Court etiquette.

'Champagne?' said the Queen to Sykes at her side.

'Why do you offer him that "mock,"' interrupted the King.
'Give him a whisky and soda.'

And presently a string quartet performed most memorably upon the four famous Stradivarius Court violins.

'Have you enjoyed the evening?' said Emilio de Torres, speaking to Ronald.

'Scarcely enjoyed, so much as wrapped in amazement at perhaps the most brilliant Court in Europe.'

'Perhaps!'

'That is to say, my experience is so limited.'

'A ce qu'il paraît, now!'

Thus ended an example of the old régime, comparable in pomp and magnificence to the pre-War court of Austria, but relieved by the lighter touches introduced by the King himself at carefully selected moments.

Then followed a heavy load of functions mostly official yet balanced by extremely interesting social contacts, and the return to England via Paris, without any incident of importance.

A few weeks later, J C C Davidson applied to Sykes for Ronald to be his deputy as Private Secretary to Bonar Law, since Davidson had to go to the Argentine for three months on private affairs. Sykes, while regretting this seconding of his right-hand man, agreed. On 29th March, Ronald became Private Secretary to Bonar Law.

Mr Bonar Law was then Lord Privy Seal, and leader of the Coalition Government both in the House of Commons and the Cabinet in order to give Mr Lloyd George greater freedom of action for participation at conferences abroad and at home. He lived with his sister, Miss Mary Law, at No 11 Downing Street, the official residence next to that of the Prime Minister.

In 1914 Ronald had enrolled himself, like everyone else, for service covering the duration of the war. That was six years ago and since the Armistice he had more than once expressed an inclination to resume his retirement when a suitable opportunity occurred. Hitherto the aftermath of the war had carried him along on its tide for, though it would no doubt have been possible for him to relinquish official life long since, no suitable check had produced the obvious moment to step naturally aside.

In view of all this it now seemed to me pretty certain that, whatever alternative might befall, he would not return to the Air Ministry.

On the 23rd of June he wrote to Sykes from Downing Street:

'As my three months will expire on the 29th I propose to report to you for duty on Wednesday, the 30th, failing orders to the contrary. This will, I think, be quite convenient to Mr Bonar Law as David's private affairs will apparently allow him to resume his duties this week. I should very much like to see you however during the next few days because the time has now come I think when I might conveniently retire, and I should like to talk this over with you.'

Considerable demobilisation was taking place throughout Government Departments in pursuance of recommendations made (I think) by the Bonsor Committee, and I myself was released on the 6th July. Selection among women was made in the first instance of individuals who had private means. I had been wearing a fur coat during the spring and was therefore placed in that category without further enquiry.

Ronald came back to the Air Ministry and resumed his duties with General Sykes, but on the 12th July Mr Bonar Law wrote to him personally inviting him to accept the substantive appointment which he had held temporarily for the past three months. I was accordingly right in my forecast!

And in the meantime another matter had been working up to its natural conclusion. Of late Sykes had periodically enquired, rather timidly for him, if Ronald was doing anything on Saturday, and they had proceeded together to Cherkley. It seemed obvious, however, that a visit to Lord Beaverbrook was not the only purpose, charming host though he was, and also it became noticeable on these occasions that Bonar happened to be going there too with

his daughter Isabel Sykes was defeated at last. On the 3rd of June 1920 he married her, and Ronald was his best man. 'Easily the best man,' he claimed, because his own transfer from Sykes to Mr Bonar Law had clearly proved his worth as *galopin*, or *postillon d'amour*, with a result no less commendable than his own lofty standard. Sykes subsequently (1922) became a Member of Parliament for the Hallam Division of Sheffield, and later served in India, as Governor of Bombay.

CHAPTER 18

1920

RONALD WAS NOW DEFINITELY INSTALLED, NO LONGER AS A LOCUM tenens, in the library occupied by Disraeli and at the large double desk actually used by Gladstone, and by subsequent Prime Ministers,¹ for Bonar never worked at a desk and disliked large rooms. He set himself seriously to master his job since success depends upon preparation and '*a force de forger on devient forgeron*'.

It was the beginning of the Easter recess, so time was available, and he studied his subject with method and diligence. He saturated himself in *Anson, Redlich, and Erskine May*. He acquired a working knowledge of Constitutional Law and Parliamentary Procedure, but in addition to this he commenced a lengthy research, which continued for several years, into the art and usages of a Private Secretary.

Disraeli had described the understanding which existed between himself and his Secretary, Monty Corry:

'The relationship between a Minister and his Secretary, is, or should be, among the finest that can exist between two individuals. Except perhaps the married state there is none in which so great a confidence is involved, in which more forbearance ought to be exercised, or more sympathy ought to exist, and that of the highest kind, and the perpetual difficulties, the alternations of triumph and defeat develop devotion. A youthful Secretary will naturally feel some degree of enthusiasm for his Chief, and a wise Minister will never stint his regard for one in whose intelligence and honour he finds he can place his confidence.' A hundred and fifty years earlier King Charles II had eulogised the value of Sydney Godolphin in this cryptic aphorism — 'Sydney is never in the way, and never out of the way.'

Thus inspired, Ronald began to find out for himself the duties and qualities which make for the success of a modern Private

¹ In 1853 Mr Gladstone prepared the first of his thirteen Budget speeches at this desk. It now bears a small silver tablet engraved with its history, placed there by the Office of Works at Ronald's request.

Secretary as it is, or should be, understood to-day He seized upon every writing of, or reference to, any of his predecessors who had left a mark Such notables as Murray of Broughton,¹ Louis de Bourrienne,² W F Cowper,³ Monty Corry,⁴ Arthur Godley,⁵ Jack Sandars,⁶ and others He put all this accumulated experience into the melting-pot, then set his own standards, made his own rules, and sought anew the principles of his art For even the introduction of telephones and typewriters had materially changed the outlook

Returning from Paris with Sir Eyre Crowe, the permanent head of the Foreign Office described to him a scene actually experienced by himself which indicates this metamorphosis Not long after entering the Diplomatic Service, Eyre Crowe was alone in the room of Lord Salisbury's Private Secretary, to his consternation the telephone bell rang, this being the first installation of that modern invention at the Foreign Office Crowe adjusted the receiver to his ear and found himself orally confronted with the Secretary of State asking for his Secretary, who happily entered the room at that moment Crowe replied with appropriate respect and transmitted the message, whereupon the Private Secretary flung himself clear of his office jacket in favour of a frock coat, straightened his hair before a glass on the wall, and arrived at the telephone suitably appareled to hold converse with his Chief

About thirty years earlier a memoir had been produced defining the Life and Duties of a Private Secretary, but since then many changes had come to pass and no attempt made to re-explain his functions or to indicate the boundaries of unseen power which regulate his activities behind the political scenes Yet the human

¹ Murray of Broughton, Private Secretary to Prince Charles Edward

² Louis Antoine Fauvalet de Chambonneres de Bourrienne, born 1769, Private Secretary to Napoleon Bonaparte while first Consul, but was released because of a weakness for accepting commissions

³ W F Cowper, Private Secretary to Lord Melbourne 1835-46 and raised to the Peerage as Lord Mount Temple

⁴ Monty Corry, Private Secretary to Disraeli Was raised to the Peerage as Lord Rowton following the General Election of May 1880 for services to Lord Beaconsfield

⁵ Arthur Godley, Private Secretary to Mr Gladstone 1872-4 and 1880-2, was raised to the Peerage as Lord Kilbracken

⁶ The Rt Hon Jack Sandars, Private Secretary to Mr Balfour

element does not change, for a few years previously Kilbracken had made the following note during Gladstone's administration 'I remember, when a Committee of the Cabinet was enquiring into some serious leakage of secrets, being called in to give my opinion about it the substance of my evidence was that the official cask, unlike ordinary casks, generally leaked at the top and not at the bottom My subsequent experience in the public service has entirely confirmed that opinion' This view would probably be endorsed to-day, half a century later In any case Ronald was able to quote it as expressing his own reflections on a precisely similar occasion

So he based his conclusions upon the cumulative experience of past 'Professors' and tempered or amplified them by the requirements of his own period having regard always to the temperament of the Minister primarily concerned Opinion seemed to differ widely as to the exact boundary by which his functions were circumscribed The Civil Service, for example, drew an arbitrary line of demarcation between the departmental and the political duties involved, the former being essentially his, while the latter belonged exclusively to his colleague the Parliamentary Private Secretary

The Service recommendation might therefore be rendered 'take infinite trouble, devil the subject, find its lowest denominator, discover the competent authority, and take heed to save thine own face,' but it seemed obvious that the extent or limit of his usefulness could only be decided by himself, and that the more harassed his master might be, the more imperturbable must his Private Secretary appear

He must be susceptible as a chameleon to every shade of atmosphere, reticent though not backward in coming forward, tolerant and patient yet decisive and forceful, receptive to great men and adaptable to fools

He must remember that a case is more often lost through being unpalatably presented than because it is inherently wrong 'The settlement of any question depends upon the way in which it is presented,' said Litvinoff to Tchitcherin in an important despatch He must remember that diplomacy comprehends no perversion of the truth but only the rearrangement of facts, and that to win a race by eighteen lengths may prove evidence of stupidity, when it

could have been won by half a neck without either chagrin to the opponent, or the disclosure of strength He must cultivate, therefore, an infinite capacity for holding his cards, and bear in mind the old Arab proverb 'If thou shalt repent thee once for thy silence, thou shalt repent thee ten times for thy speech'

He must seek the closest friendship of his Chief when off parade no less than when on duty, and being himself the nerve centre of his staff he will thus diffuse the changing chiaroscuro of his master's directing influence

He comes into contact with all the prominent actors upon the political stage and is in confidential relationship with the controlling constitutional force behind the Throne He has his finger upon the pulse of every movement behind the scenes he is therefore able, from his coign of vantage, to assess hum in nature in all its phases, to watch the workings of great minds and to observe the machinations of lesser ones, but above all he must remember th it while the world knocks at his threshold it is not to him, but to his office, that sycophancy bows

Nor can it be too constantly present to his mind that while he should be an asset he may in a moment become a liability A thoughtless word, careless advice, immature judgment, or a hasty conclusion may rebound against his Chief to an irreparable degree Responsibility he must assume, but without ostentation or self-assertion, and finally he will write on his table of forces in unmistakable characters

Since wisdom's ways I fain would seek
I must reflect with care
Of whom I speak, to whom I speak,
And how, and when, and where

His friendship with Lord Beaverbrook now assumed a new phase because of the latter's affection for, and intimacy with, his master Max Aitkin first appeared in Bonar Law's life when he arrived in 1908 with a letter of introduction and the desire to unite his business interests in Nova Scotia with those of Bonar's old firm, Messrs William Jacks & Co , in Glasgow A friendship was born between these two at once and developed rapidly Max entered politics and within two years had established his position as Bonar's trusted supporter

On the 13th November at a meeting of the Unionist Party, held at the Carlton Club, Max arrived alone with Bonar. He had cajoled and briefed him thoroughly, he had implored him not to underestimate himself as was his custom, he dwelt upon Bonar's extreme value to the party, and actually succeeded in overcoming some of his reticence. As a result Bonar was invited to succeed Balfour as Leader of the Party, and in the autumn of 1912 was summoned to Balmoral as official leader of His Majesty's Opposition.

In 1916, on the resignation of Mr Asquith's Government, the King invited Bonar to form a Cabinet, but Bonar resisted on discovering that Asquith would not serve under him. The invitation was then successfully extended to Mr Lloyd George, and this was more or less the origin of the Coalition Government.

Bonar became Chancellor of the Exchequer, Leader of the House of Commons, and a working partner in the Premiership because of Lloyd George's preoccupation with conferences both at home and abroad when the Armistice entailed a reconstruction of Europe. So much was this the case that a question was asked in the House of Commons, whether in view of the rarity of the occasions on which the Prime Minister was in attendance at the House, Mr Bonar Law could give an assurance that any statement made by himself as Leader engaged without reservation the responsibility of the Government? Whereupon Sir Fortescue Flannery (I think it was), intervened 'Before the Right Hon Gentleman answers that question,' he said, 'may I ask if he is aware that the majority in this House is fully satisfied with the present arrangement?' And Bonar Law returned an unqualified affirmative.

It was in these conditions that Ronald had made his official début in the House of Commons. The first occasion was memorable for him. He had dined disconsolately in the Strangers' Room feeling desperately uneasy and lonely like a new boy at school. He returned to his room under the guidance of a kindly official because of his ignorance of the House of Commons geography. The eleven-o'clock rule had been suspended, and he faced the unhappy prospect of sitting there for half the night under the oppressive weight of new surroundings and responsibilities. At nine o'clock in walked Bonar's Parliamentary Private Secretary, and sat down — Stanley Baldwin. That was an action of sheer kindness towards a

novice whose feelings he correctly appraised. He remained with Ronald until through the corridors of the House rang the cry, 'Who goes home?' It was 2 a.m. and the House had risen.

The personnel of his own staff is in itself an interesting sidelight upon Bonar, for his Parliamentary Private Secretary held concurrently the ministerial post of Financial Secretary to the Treasury, a most unprecedented combination which arose in this way. When, owing to the exigencies of the War, Bonar was deprived of Sir John Baird (now Lord Stonehaven) his then Parliamentary Private Secretary, two very wise heads were set thinking, namely Lord Edmund Talbot, the Chief Whip, and Sir George Younger, the Chairman of the Party, who sought to find as substitute some pleasant person possessing the additional merit of safety. They took into their counsels John Davidson, Bonar's Private Secretary who had just migrated from the Colonial Office to the Treasury, on the appointment of his master as Chancellor of the Exchequer.

Sir Robert Chalmers was then Permanent Secretary of the Treasury. This story was recalled one evening years afterwards as the shadows lengthened in the long gallery at Chequers, when Lord Chalmers, as he had then become, and John Davidson became reminiscent, and Ronald receptive. 'When I reflect (run Ronald's notes) "upon the pontifical greatness and learned superiority of Lord Chalmers, the punctilio which framed his measured utterance and his apparent belief that the Almighty created Civil Servants first and sundry other persons afterwards, of whose existence out of respect for the Almighty, Lord Chalmers was vaguely aware, I recognise my good fortune in ever having met him. He would have been an epoch-making figure had it not been that, like Lord Curzon, he marked the end of an epoch, and I often wondered how those two were able to reconcile each other's presence when they met in the flesh."

Into the sanctum of this great personage then came young Davidson. To Chalmers, Davidson would appear perfectly nondescript, but his entry unannounced provided a novel experience, the blue eyes, clean complexion, and engaging ways of this captivating boy amused the most eminent chief of the greatest service in the world. A smile doubtless flickered across the mask of that academic superlative and he thawed a little. Davidson, completely unaware of the enormity which he had perpetrated, sought

guidance as to a suitable candidate for the appointment of Parliamentary Private Secretary to his master, the new Chancellor

This would concern Chalmers' Department and would of course engage his serious attention Mr Baldwin was at this time a Junior Lord of the Treasury He had qualified for the distinction by sheer merit as a back bencher who, while scarcely known to speak in the House, had been more than normally attentive to the claims of the Division Lobby Such consideration gratifies the Whips who accordingly pass on the good news and, as a possible result, their nominee obtains preferment

Thus, from the revival of these events during that memorable evening in the Long Gallery at Chequers, the story was told of how Mr Baldwin became Parliamentary Private Secretary to the new Chancellor of the Exchequer on the advice of Chalmers 'because he was too innocuous to intrigue' And also how during that same year he rose to be Financial Secretary to the Treasury I have heard it roundly asserted that his tenure of this office was the worst ever known by the Treasury, and he certainly received severe handling from the succeeding Chancellor of the Exchequer, Mr Austen Chamberlain, whose whole attitude however was reversed five years later when he was dubbed a Knight of the Garter on the submission of Mr Baldwin after the ill-fated Treaty of Locarno

The circumstances were recalled by Chalmers and Davidson who described how Bonar, *pantoufléd*, and restlessly rolling a big cigar from one side of his mouth to the other, had entered the room of Sir Robert Chalmers interpellating him thus

B L Chalmers, who do you think we should appoint to the Financial Secretaryship?

C (*in his courtly manner*) If I may say so, Mr Chancellor, that is a matter solely within your personal discretion Have you considered the merits of your own Parliamentary Private Secretary?

B L Oh, no! I'm afraid he wouldn't do He'd not be able to carry it (*Exit*)

Half an hour later to Davidson, his own Private Secretary

B L Chalmers wants me to appoint Stanley Baldwin I suppose the Treasury is strong enough to keep itself going, and him too for that matter, but what we need is a man who can do the work in the House

D Well, why not give him a trial?

And so the appointment materialised, but the support generously given to the view that he was never cut out for a subordinate position would seem to have been justified

The case of John Davidson was different Owing to faulty eyesight and defective feet, he was deprived of any participation with the combatant services in the war, but he had been attached to the Civil Service since 1910 Educated at Westminster and Cambridge he never experienced the reverses usual to boys, even in his sheltered generation, and from Cambridge he straddled the breach at a single stride, became Private Secretary to Lord Crewe, Colonial Secretary, and continued in that post with Lulu Harcourt and Bonar Law until 1916 He followed the latter to the Treasury Having served two Colonial Secretaries in Mr Asquith's administration, he remained a Liberal in politics, freely ventilating his views He disapproved of titles and honours notwithstanding the fact that, under Liberal Ministries alone, the House of Lords had been fortified by no less than three hundred and four creations in the peerage during the past eighty-five years In deprecating the bestowal of certain honours, he wrote in 1919 to Lord Stamfordham, 'We have had so many friendly and confidential discussions on this horrible subject,' and the following year he refused, with some asperity, a tentative proposal from Bonar Law that he should be dubbed a Knight Commander of the Bath

In addition to his personal charm, Providence would seem to have singled him out for special consideration and his complement of blessings included a wealthy uncle in Buenos Ayres to whom he paid periodical visits Hitherto a journey to the Argentine on 'urgent private affairs' was not difficult to arrange during a recess of Parliament, but now that Bonar Law was virtually the Head of the Government the necessity became irksome and there was an additional consideration

The friendship between Bonar's Private and Parliamentary Secretaries developed rapidly Davidson was invited to Astley Hall, Mr Baldwin's home in Worcestershire He immediately captured the household affections collectively and individually with the single exception of a certain Miss Joan Dickinson, daughter of the Rt Hon Sir Willoughby Dickinson and a school friend of the Baldwin girls, but even she capitulated and married him on April 10th, 1919

Thus it came about that Davidson announced his prospective departure for the Argentine and explained to Bonar that he had arranged a substitute for himself in the person of Ronald who would report for duty on a given date. By this time Bonar had become Lord Privy Seal and Davidson subsequently retired altogether leaving Ronald as his successor. Had Davidson adopted the shoemaker's maxim of sticking to his last there is little doubt that he would probably have ranked in history as the finest Private Secretary of all time.

And then there was 'Aunt Mary'.

When Davidson handed over to Ronald he briefed him on two points only. He gave him half a sheet of notepaper inscribed with the names of six really reliable Press representatives and he said, 'If you ever want to convey any information to Bonar expeditiously, seek out "Aunt Mary" and confide it to her in the strictest confidence. Bonar will be in possession of it at once.' Ronald followed this advice with unfailing success, for 'Aunt Mary' was the true Magnetic North in Bonar's hemisphere. She was his sister, and everyone knew that, short of accidents, she would survive him by sheer Scottish pertinacity and then — the light having departed from her life — that she would follow him. But the diagnosis was not difficult, for she took all those to her capacious heart who loved him, and systematically scolded the few who ventured to question his views, and everyone was right as subsequent events proved, but then 'Aunt Mary' was one in a thousand, and her brother one in a million.

While it is probably true that brilliance in Parliament has found birth in the recognised debating societies, and that a President of Union may well be earmarked for political distinction before leaving his University, as in the case of Curzon and Birkenhead, it does not necessarily follow that any wide experience of the world has been acquired beyond a perfunctory study of Blue books. The requisite qualifications are therefore an extensive memory and a well-developed gift for platform speaking.

Bonar started with none of these recognised advantages, excepting his early experience as a member of the Glasgow Parliamentary Debating Society. 'Aunt Mary' used to say that, as a young man, he would recline upon a sofa studying a volume of Macaulay, and learning whole pages by heart. He continued this

practice until he could recite to her a double column after reading it only once. He brought this trick, as he called it, to a state of such perfection that in Ronald's time he never appeared to read anything at all. The mere fact of holding a newspaper in his hand seemed to give him ample opportunity of assimilating anything of interest therein which he could subsequently quote with absolute accuracy.

This super-sense in him was amazing, and far outstripped any similar gift in others, but as the Rt Hon H A L Fisher has said, a remarkable memory is not sufficient to explain the achievement of his Budget Speech in 1917 in which he discussed the Nation's finance for nearly two hours 'with nothing before him but a half sheet of notepaper with a single row of figures written upon it'.

On one occasion at a Primrose League Meeting in the Albert Hall he was to be the principal speaker with Lord Curzon in the Chair. Ronald had previously produced a Thucydides and drawn his attention to the passage from Pericles which seemed appropriate to his theme, and which since then has been used constantly. The print was inconveniently small, known technically I believe as 6-point nonpareil, and the text apparently unsuitable since Bonar glanced at it, closed the book and thanked him. But next day he quoted it faultlessly as follows '*So they gave their bodies to the Commonwealth, and received each for his own memory praise that will never die, and with it the grandest of all sepulchres, not that in which their mortal bones have laid but a home in the minds of men.*'

As a dialectician 'he yields a rapier which is always sharp, always bright, and always sustained, and on the platform he exhibits an incomparable gift for lucid mind exposition, adorned by simplicity and sincerity of style which no one has reached in English oratory for a very long time.' Thus said F E (Lord Birkenhead, himself an Olympian), and Bonar Law, whose modesty proffered no claim whatever to personal distinction, once observed to a party of journalists, 'I don't think I can honestly say that I have ever heard one single eloquent speech in the House of Commons.'

Soon after Ronald's appointment, Bonar said to him during their short daily drive together from Downing Street to the House

of Commons 'My sister says that it took me nearly two years to be even reasonably polite to David I hope you won't have that same experience!' Very shortly afterwards an episode occurred which satisfied Ronald that he had Bonar's complete confidence

Mr Lloyd George was breakfasting under a tree in the garden of No 10 With him were Lord Reading, Miss Megan Lloyd George and Bonar The famous library of Disraeli overlooked this party and a french window led directly on to the terrace Ronald, now occupying this room, had occasion to speak to Bonar urgently, but found the Prime Minister in the middle of a discourse, so he waited Bonar drew him into a chair and there he remained listening to the conditions which were to govern Lord Reading's appointment as Viceroy to India before the question had even been submitted to the Cabinet This discussion also included the important question of a visit of the Prince of Wales to India during Lord Reading's tenure of office

Bonar's understanding of the temper of the House of Commons seemed no less intuitive than his sensitiveness to atmosphere generally, either political or personal For this reason, although not necessarily in the Chamber, he never left the precincts of the House during its sessions and was therefore ready to be called at any moment when difficulties threatened or when Government spokesmen were hard pressed At such times the tension would be relieved perceptibly by his mere presence on the Treasury Bench, and if, as frequently happened, it was necessary for him to intervene in a debate which he had perhaps neither heard nor followed, he would shoulder the whole burden on the sketchiest prompting from one of his colleagues, and because of its indulgence to him personally, carry the House

His ready wit combined with tolerance and his wistful smile were completely disarming, and enabled him to take liberties never successfully attempted either before or since his time

Many were the instances of this personal eminence, but a particularly telling example occurred in connection with a burning subject of the moment known as the Leipzig Trials, whereon the Government was being constantly assailed at Question Time, and upheld with learned skill by Sir Gordon Hewart, the then Attorney-General In his absence one day these ques-

tions fell to the Lord Privy Seal, who took his seat with the usual string of written answers in his hand All went well until the next question on the order paper was one which Bonar particularly did not wish to answer, so he unblushingly read the wrong reply The House appeared mystified, and then the Speaker ventured to suggest to the Right Hon Gentleman that he had perhaps inadvertently, etc , etc Thereupon Bonar apologised to the House, searched through his string in vain and announced with his captivating smile, 'This must be a mistake of my Private Secretary's' (laughter) He had in fact deliberately torn out the undesirable reply before entering the Chamber and the question was never answered at all This may appear a small affair, yet no one but Bonar could have got away with it

His dejected appearance was often due to anxieties other than those of temperament or health — in regard to the latter he was completely stoical — and notwithstanding the fact that Mr Lloyd George consulted him about everything, Ministerial difficulties were inevitable, and posts were sometimes filled, or academic appointments made, without his knowledge

'Is it true that the P M has appointed the Attorney-General to be Lord Chief Justice?' ¹ he said to Ronald, and then he asked to see the P M at once if he could be found Ronald went off to the Prime Minister's Private Secretary and the interview took place, for interview it certainly was Had anyone been in doubt at that moment as to which of the two was Head of the Government he might have been excused for guessing it to be Bonar There he sat behind the desk in the Prime Minister's long room, the room which he always occupied in the House of Commons, and there was Mr Lloyd George being taken to task like a junior Minister As a result Sir Gordon Hewart's appointment was rescinded and Bonar explained to him afterwards that because he could not be spared, he must continue for a time as Attorney-General and the office of Lord Chief Justice would be kept in abeyance for him

And so while this complex character shrank from power, it changed chameleon-like from gentle modesty, adorned by some almost apologetic witticism, to a Pythagorean attitude of irresistible strength

¹ This was in succession to Lord Reading, now Viceroy-designate to India

One night a Colonial Prime Minister was to speak at the Connaught Rooms. The substance of his speech had a special importance as he was due to meet Bonar the following day, so Ronald attended the function. The speech was delivered after ten o'clock and would therefore be too late for reproduction in the morning Press. Ronald accordingly made copious notes, left immediately afterwards, and prepared a synopsis for Bonar. During breakfast he scanned the Press and, as expected, found no reference to the subject. With a slight sense of triumph he presented his synopsis to Bonar, who thanked him as usual and, without even looking at it, proceeded to tell him point by point what it contained. 'But,' said Ronald, somewhat mortified, 'there is no mention of it in the Press!' 'No,' Bonar replied, 'but putting myself in his position, I can estimate pretty accurately what he would have to say.'

'Why did Northcliffe come straight to you after leaving me?' asked Lloyd George. 'Because you told him to go to the Devil,' said Bonar. And when the iron soul of Lord Curzon became increasingly embittered because he found his office undermined, its functions annexed, and the whole fabric crumbling while, across the road in the Garden of No 10, bungalows, known as the 'Garden Suburb,' were sheltering an amateur staff of diplomats, organised to deal with Foreign Affairs, and directly responsible to Lloyd George, the noble marquis cried aloud and wept like a child on Bonar's shoulder, and Bonar comforted him, called him George — a special concession reserved only for such occasions — and diverted his dignity from thoughts of resignation. For these two, so completely antithetical in method, understood and valued each other.

Much play has been made with the personality of Lord Curzon. The splendour of his being was fanned from a spark of the Divine, when he appeared, lesser personages evaporated or were expected to yield to his presence. Yet how easily could his greatness have dispensed with ostentation! Ronald was once in Sir Eyre Crowe's room at the Foreign Office. Mr Montagu Norman arrived. The three were seated there together when Lord Curzon entered. The trio rose, Lord Curzon paused at the door, looked vaguely through the Governor of the Bank of England, and observed to Sir Eyre Crowe, 'When you have terminated your interview I will speak with you,' and stood like a statue. There was a dramatic silence.

while the Governor walked round him to the door and made his exit, but Curzon was sublimely unaware of any abnormality

To Ronald he was always tolerant, unbending and even considerate, which may have been due to his puzzled affection for Bonar or anything that was his. Ronald even ventured on one occasion to twit him with the desirability of disguising his voice if he wished to preserve his anonymity on the personal telephone in his London house, for he invariably answered it himself by means of a receiver fitted over his bed with an extending arm. During the night Ronald, addressing himself ostensibly to his Secretary, Sir George Cunningham, had enquired by telephone if he could speak to Lord Curzon, knowing perfectly well that he was in fact already doing so. The reply came back, not as between Secretaries, but in the stilted words, 'I will ask,' with his customary short 'a'. His subsequent reaction to this temerity was to say quite gently, 'I have yet to learn of any suitable alternative to that of following a partner's lead.' With which admonition he patted Ronald on the shoulder, and completely dispelled any suggestion of a rebuff. At two o'clock in the morning he might be discovered totting up the items of his butcher's book, for he loved to place his imprint upon the veriest detail, but despite his idiosyncrasies Ronald found him always gracious, from the days when he knew him as Viceroy in India.

Notwithstanding appearances to the contrary, he was extremely sensitive and sympathetic. During the autumn of 1919 Ahmed Khan Shah of Persia visited London. A banquet was given in his honour by the Government at Lancaster House. Lord Curzon, as host, was waiting with His Majesty, while a few preliminary presentations were being made at the foot of the famous staircase, when a most untoward occurrence nearly marred the proceedings. The Shah was very short, and almost equally stout, so that he presented a spherical appearance. The floor was too highly polished to be safe, and unfortunately the Shah came to grief. He had not far to fall, but having done so his little figure oscillated like a football — Gilbert's 'Discontented Sugar Broker' was confidentially recalled! Lord Curzon seemed nonplussed. It was a problem that he had never envisaged. Nor could he bend, being himself encased in the surgical spinal support which he always wore. But his expression was one of the most intense pity and desolation.

Ronald, who was close to him at the time with Armitage Smith of the Treasury, says that, without uttering a word, the pathos of his whole appearance called others to instant action and sobriety

Fortunately a group of officials surrounding the helpless figure sheltered it from view. But no power short of tackle could raise, help, or replace it, for it simply slid, as on ice. Then the brains of the Civil Service came into play. His Majesty was pivoted round — and hurriedly checked before he spun too far — the feet were pointing now towards the bottom step of the staircase, a deftly impelled glide, and they made contact. A pleading whisper, ‘Would your Majesty straighten the legs?’ and two erstwhile ‘Varsity athletes’ hoisted the Royal Presence. Lord Curzon, now sensibly relieved, was able to proceed according to plan.

But the Shah was apparently prone to the unusual. When leaving England for Paris, he insisted on crossing the Channel via Boulogne, where, amongst those officials ready to receive him, he sought out the British Consul, who was wearing the Persian Order of the Lion and Sun. So proud was he of this decoration that he had caused the rather defective insignia to be copied in precious metal and real gems. This fact had been made known to the Shah, and was the cause of his excursion. He praised and congratulated the British Consul. He conferred upon him a higher grade of the same Order — relieving him the while of his ‘inferior’ emblem.

Between the Prime Minister in fact and the Prime Minister in effect, as between their respective staffs, there existed complete unanimity and the latter alternated as did their Masters. But, like his colleague Lord Curzon, and indeed like everyone else, Bonar had his little weakness, though whether feigned or real I am not concerned to know. The only bait to which he was ever known to rise was provided by Mr Lloyd George. In this particular his loyalty eclipsed even his sense of humour, and occasionally it seemed expedient to wean him from his despondency. At such times someone would suggest that so magnificent a head as that of Mr Lloyd George should properly be supported by a better pair of legs. The draw was infallible, but the riposte instantaneous and invariable ‘Legs! What’s the matter with his legs?’ Then feeling suitably rebuked, one would venture, ‘But it’s such a pity that

they are knock-kneed' Whereupon with the light of battle in his eye, but with gentle reproof in his voice, he would express the unanswerable conviction that there were 'no better legs in Europe' And, as in so many other matters of first importance, I believe that Ll G would have seen eye to eye with him even in this

CHAPTER 19

1920

NO 11, DOWNING STREET COMMUNICATES WITH THE PRIME Minister's residence by a doorway leading into the front hall of No 10 Proceeding one day up the long passage to the inner hall, Ronald found that Lord Stamfordham had been seated there for some time upon a wooden chair as in a railway waiting-room

A novel experience this, for the King's Private Secretary was senior, both by virtue of years and position, to any contemporary Staff Official Ronald was shocked Lord Stamfordham was shocked too, and never again exposed himself to a similar incident during the remainder of that administration But the episode brought the two of them together, and forged a link

At the period of Ronald's debut into the official sphere of political activity, Lord Stamfordham had reached the summit of his fame, and it was easy for him to extend the greatest kindness and guidance to Ronald while *en poste*, which he did unexceptionally from the date of the incident first described He explained precedents and, from his archives, produced examples of extremely valuable technical procedure gone into abeyance but now re-adjusted by the two of them to modern usage As an instance he actually sent Ronald copies of a series of letters submitted to the Sovereign by successive Prime Ministers from the days of Disraeli to those of Campbell Bannerman, which would nowadays be drafted by the Private Secretary, and which therefore closely concerned Ronald's job

That they were able to revive much of this technique where possible, and indeed to do so proved very desirable in several cases, afforded Lord Stamfordham obvious satisfaction, for he was not only extremely Conservative but sometimes archaic in his methods King George V constantly reminded him that he had 'a Gunner's mind' and, apropos some question relating to the War Office, Lord Stamfordham explained to Ronald how he had 'heard the Duke of Wellington assure Queen Victoria that she was herself the

paramount head of the Army' He genuinely believed this, although in fact he was, of course, quoting the Queen

Occasionally his rigid sense of decorum seemed unable to assimilate either constitutional provision or licence. The following incident, for example, would have provoked a long and terrible *coup de bec*, a diatribe of condemnation, a vivid reflection of horrified reaction, and probably a determined pronouncement that the Prime Minister might make suitable representation to the Speaker of the House of Commons!

During an all-night sitting on one outstanding occasion, the attendance in the Chamber had dwindled, and the prescribed quota of forty members was only maintained by the watchfulness of the Whips. The proceedings became sluggish as the night progressed. Here and there Members reclined at full length with their feet upon the famous green benches, now and then Members seemed to have lost the thread of discourse, in fact to have taken leave of the House, and by and large the patient listener heard ominous sounds from Members indicative of their unanimous quiescence. All this coupled with the subject of debate, would lend itself to appropriate description — irresistibly tempting to Ronald — but for the reasons already indicated the delicate susceptibilities of Lord Stamfordham must not be violated.

It had to be remembered in this connection that one of the earliest historical objects of the House of Commons was to exclude the Crown from interfering in its proceedings or influencing its decisions, the original method of securing which was to assert as a legal principle 'That the Crown should have no current knowledge of the proceedings in the House of Commons' (Redlich, *The Proceedings of the House of Commons*, vol. 2, page 89), and that although 'since the time of George III a special arrangement had been made to give the Sovereign as speedy and direct information as possible about debates in the House of Commons' (*idem*, pp. 96, 97), this could not be held to mean that the principle of non-intervention had been abandoned, since the latter still remains a cogent factor in the Constitution.

Again, it was for consideration that the Members of the House of Commons 'may enjoy liberty of speech in all their debates and that all their proceedings may receive from His Majesty the most favourable construction' (Erskine and May, 1906, p. 59), and

further that 'The King cannot take notice of anything said or done in the House, but by the report of the House itself' (*idem*, p 62)

These together with many relevant considerations would of course have been present to the mind of Lord Stamfordham as sufficiently convincing that any representation made to the Speaker of the House of Commons on behalf of His Majesty might be unconstitutional. Yet his sense of propriety would have been outraged. He had emerged from an era famous for its staying power and he remained, like the village stocks, a grim reminder of stern disapproval. His fading vision was unable to focus upon the evolution of modern speed, making rings round Victorian stability. The Church and the State provided his only horizon, while the head of both monopolised his possessive sense—he spoke always of '*my King*,' or '*my Sovereign*' His social appraisement was limited by Burke, Debrett, and the Archbishop of Canterbury, it was sometimes therefore a considerable ordeal to appease him in respect of some name which the Prime Minister intended submitting to the King for one of the half-yearly Honours Lists.

'But no one has ever heard of his father,' Lord Stamfordham would say — 'Oh, yes, his father was a most respected local builder' — 'Well then, how can you possibly,' etc etc. But when reminded that the father of Christ was a carpenter, he would capitulate and remark, 'Oh, well, I suppose it's all right if the Prime Minister really *wishes* it.'

To Ronald personally he was receptive, flexible, and more than a friend, because he regarded his office as second only to his own, putting aside all differences of age, seniority and experience in favour of position. But with his own staff he was a veritable martinet.

Lord Stamfordham was justly regarded as a paragon of the pen in the matter of note-writing. His personal letters were crisp, short and to the point, yet not without polish, perhaps even inclined to pedantry because by long practice he had acquired the exact phrase and balance of words calculated to convey his meaning without sacrificing elegance. He adhered strictly to the rule that every communication must be acknowledged, and every statement committed to paper.

In these circumstances the following unique exception is the

more remarkable It happened that his only son, The Hon John N Bigge of the 1st Battalion 60th Rifles, was confined to hospital in Khartoum just before the war Ronald, who was then shooting in the Sudan, went to see him He photographed him several times in bed for fun, and arrived home on the eve of our declaration of war in 1914 as already mentioned In 1915, having returned from France, Ronald was at the War Office, and then John Bigge was killed Remembering that he had the last photographs, probably, ever taken of him, Ronald asked a great friend on the Royal Household Staff to show them to Lord Stamfordham in the hope that he might care to have them He was apparently deeply touched and gratefully kept them, but never alluded to the incident again by script or spoken word

Sixteen years later Ronald went to his Memorial Service at Westminster Abbey, on the 9th April 1931, with feelings very different from those of mere respect

It is not only because the close liaison with Lord Stamfordham was so helpful to Ronald personally that it seems desirable to dwell at some length upon it, but because it also gave expression to a confidence in Bonar, reflecting of course the King's views, which subsequently proved extremely valuable and would otherwise have remained obscure

At this time certain political movements were beginning, hardly recognised or suspected save by Bonar's almost uncanny prescience It is possible that they would never have developed but for the claims of international affairs following the Armistice which resulted in the frequent absences abroad of the Prime Minister The Coalition was no longer popular, and the Labour Party became the mouthpiece of discontent There were symptoms of unrest among the electorate, which looked to the future rather than the present They were disturbed by the high cost of living, the housing difficulty, and the burden of taxation Labour preached a better status for the workers, higher wages, and the advance of the proletariat It had forsaken direct action and was gaining ground by constitutional methods Men were returning from the Army to the stagnation of their villages They drew comparisons between their own position and those of men who had stayed at home They were ready converts to a party which promised to put things right by State action

The increase in the capital value of real estate, equal, it was said, to the War Debt of £8,000 millions, was exploited to show that while the wage-earner bore the burden of the increased cost of living and of the War Debt, the capitalist had made vast profits by mere investment in shipyards, cotton-mills and other factories. Company balance sheets were used as evidence of inflated profits. The delay in carrying out Government schemes lent colour to the belief that the Coalition stood for the capitalist classes. And even the black-coated workers, seeing the advantages of Trade Unionism, made common front with the Labour Party. Finally, the Government was accused of negligence, extravagance and waste. There were, of course, answers to all these charges, but few cared to listen.

Bonar alone had his ear to the ground. He became increasingly despondent but said nothing, and the reason was this. Mr Lloyd George was personally as popular as ever, nor had his tremendous hold on the country lessened, but the pendulum of public opinion was beginning to swing against the Coalition, and the Prime Minister himself could not steady the movement by an occasional speech wedged between his innumerable conferences on the Continent.

What could Bonar do? Nothing! That is what was beginning to tell upon him, for the problem which apparently no one but he could correctly estimate at that time was a simple one. The Liberals who had hitherto formed the ballast of the Coalition were now shifting to the left, with the result that the Coalition would be forced into a Conservative position in order to defend itself against Labour and extremist attack!

What could Bonar do, he the loyal colleague of Mr Lloyd George, and yet the Leader of the Conservative Party?

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Lunch with Bonar was a curious incident, 'an episode' he called it and not a function. Ronald had once said that he allowed himself seven minutes for the actual ceremony and Bonar looked astonished. 'But why seven?' he asked. It seemed to him excessive. So after that they shared lunch every day together. The procedure was to walk into the dining-room, find a plate ready at one's seat and immediately be offered food, usually something which could

be disposed of with a spoon, preferably an egg dish. This was negotiated without interruption. Unless caught at the psychological moment with a second offering by his challenging and hair-trigger butler, Bonar would then walk out always with a pat on the shoulder for Ronald, accompanied by an admonition not to hurry. If his butler were not ready for him when he arrived, which often happened since he arrived not when lunch was announced, but when convenient to himself, he would sit down, get up again, and walk out quite absentmindedly under the impression that he had lunched, and with the same affectionate little attention to Ronald. On such occasions he had to be retrieved.

Bonar's generosity was only paralleled by his pathetically genuine hospitality. His table was always at the disposal of any Minister or official who happened to be in his room at the moment, and he never realised how rarely his invitations were accepted. But one day this happened in the case of Lord Salisbury, whose sensibility was almost as tender as Bonar's. He stayed to lunch, and on this occasion lunch was extended to ten minutes. It was the 9th of December. The substance of their conversation was not interrupted. 'Politicians,' said Bonar, 'are always disciples of expediency excepting upon a direct issue of right or wrong.' Balfour had told him that Lloyd George was 'a man of principle without principles' — (but was it not Napoleon who said that principles are excellent, they commit you to nothing?) A Frenchman whom he had met when lunching with Otto Kahn had said, 'Great Britain has certainly carved out a unique position in the world. Most people regard Englishmen as stupid, they are on the contrary solid. That is why a merely great man will never represent England.'



After jotting down these sayings Ronald adds the following note

'In view of extraneous indications, the undoubted trend of Bonar's mind, and the state of his health, I shall now lean mentally towards his early retirement.'

Senior Messenger at No 10, which means that he was Head of the four Official (Civil) servants, known as Messengers, attached to the Prime Minister An extremely responsible position He was a personage with the presence of an Ambassador and an air of distinction which came so naturally that to be saluted by him when crossing Parliament Square added to the stature of even a Cabinet Minister He treated the great ones of the world with an easy address and a paternal care, he expressed himself in language precisely correct according to the person concerned, and he spoke always with authority and with the assurance peculiar to those accustomed to give rather than to take orders

He had known each member of every Ministry, each Ambassador or Foreign Representative, and every member of the Royal Family since the days of Queen Victoria And every one of this distinguished galaxy revered, trusted and relied upon him Campbell-Bannerman had died in his arms at No 10 (on 22nd April 1908, because, unquestionably, in such circumstances the undisputed precedence of Berry could yield to no man)

When he accompanied Bonar (as Chancellor of the Exchequer) to Paris, they were met at the station by the Military Attaché representing the British Embassy, but before he could acquit himself of his official welcome, Berry thrust Bonar's hat-box into his hand, remarking, 'Kindly see, sir, that the Chancellor's hat is delivered to me personally immediately on arrival' Later, at the Quai d'Orsay, Berry stood at the bottom of the great staircase awaiting his master, completely oblivious of important Ministers of State who, to him, were lesser folk Presently Bonar came shyly down, whereupon Berry from his magnificent height spread out his arms, placed his left hand coaxingly athwart M Clemenceau's stomach, and broke into speech, 'Way, Gentlemen, I pray you,' said he, 'way for the Chancellor of the Exchequer'

And later still, when it fell to Ronald to deliver a massive Treasury inkstand, four candlesticks, and two boxes, all of silver in Queen Anne period, inscribed

To His Royal Highness the Duke of York, K G
And the Lady Elizabeth Bowes-Lyon
on their marriage

From the Prime Minister and the Cabinet
April 26th, 1923

he asked Berry to accompany him On arrival in the Picture Gallery at Buckingham Palace where the presents were being arranged, the Queen was alone with three Pages superintending, and herself placing items to the best advantage Berry immediately went to her, 'May it please your Majesty,' he began, and then with a 'you know, Ma'am' and a sweeping gesture which included both Ronald and the enormous case, he explained the merit of the gift from His Majesty's Government, and the manner in which it could best be displayed All of which the Queen accepted and seemed to regard as a worthy contribution to the occasion for, after all, this was Berry

If these attributes should fail to establish the fact that Berry was a philosopher, at any rate Ronald so regarded him, and on that account confided to him his anxieties about Bonar's health and well-being Berry had his quarters in No 10, and although Ronald never left Bonar until he retired to bed, frequently after 2 a m (about which time they ate cake together, accompanied by milk or whisky respectively, for Bonar abstained from alcohol), and although Ronald joined him again when he rose in the morning, Berry was on the spot during the intervening hours, and Berry endorsed Ronald's apprehension, but kept his counsel exclusively to himself

Meanwhile an unspoken source of sorrow was the apparent loss to Bonar of Davidson Hitherto there had been a sort of David and Jonathan tie between these two, which of late had seemingly slackened In November David had been elected for Hemel Hempstead and had become Parliamentary Private Secretary to Bonar, but this change after his absence in South America, coupled with his close and intimate friendship with Mr Baldwin, created an indefinable sense of loss Bonar's unerring instinct almost certainly told him that whether by accident or by his own estimate of probabilities David was backing Mr Baldwin, even in those early days, as a potential successor to himself

Ronald was not a little astonished when this thought was actually put into words by Berry, in spite of Bonar's studied reserve even to his sister, for 'Aunt Mary' failed to regard David as altogether indispensable Writing to Ronald after Bonar's resignation, when Baldwin was Prime Minister and David his Parliamentary Private Secretary, 'Aunt Mary' says

'You are one of the people I find it difficult to meet because I used to have such extreme pleasure in talking to you about Baldwin and David without exhausting myself praising them'

But Bonar retained his sense of humour. Indeed, without it, his intensely logical disillusionment would have been less acceptable. His low opinion of mankind excluded him from the lure of material preferment. He was unmoved by cajolery or flattery in any form, and his desire for position or wealth was confined to the simple requirements of his own family. Self-interest and jockeying for position were all around him. He saw through each subtle move as through plate glass, and when exponents of these tactics confessed and confided in him, he was not malicious but always sympathetic, though he thought them fools. He saw no advantage in Honours or rewards but only in promotion for practical purposes and as a legitimate substitute for actual currency. For example, when, after holding a Court appointment at a monetary loss of £1,400 p.a. Ronald was honoured by the King with the Royal Victorian Order, Bonar perceived therein a commendable economy in the Privy Purse.

For himself he neither wanted nor would accept anything. He had reached the summit of attainment according to his personal aspirations and now yearned for the only thing denied him, namely, retirement. But he never lost his sense of humour and there was a certain 'naughtiness' about him. Even at the height of the Irish troubles he could never understand why he must tolerate the 'stupidity' of police protection, and actually succeeded several times in shaking off the Scotland Yard detective who trailed his movements. He thought this circumvention extremely pleasant, until Ronald pointed out that the officer was doing his duty, was liable to severe reprimand if he failed, and that Bonar was in fact employing a superior finesse to bring this about. Bonar was really shocked, and sent Ronald at once to the Commissioner of Police with his apologies. It was a special gift of his to recognise on the instant if advice tendered were good or bad, and to act upon it if the former without a backward glance at his own *amour propre*.

Mr George Lansbury called with a colleague, Mr William Adamson, ex-Chairman of the Labour Party, during one of the labour difficulties, when Bonar Law had declined to receive a deputation of Hunger Marchers, and referred them to the Minister

of Labour Ronald happened to hear Berry telling them in the hall that Bonar could not see them He rushed into Bonar's room and remonstrated 'Every Member of Parliament has a personal right of approach to the Leader The difference between your accessibility and your remoteness may have consequences, particularly in the case of George Lansbury'

'Quite right,' said Bonar without a moment's hesitation, 'see if you can get them'

And Ronald, hatless in Whitehall, caught them there, while Berry, quick to perceive that everyone had apparently gone mad, apologised to Mr Lansbury, *en grand seigneur*, for his own stupidity

But although Bonar seemed fragile physically, for his life was obviously waning, there was nothing weak about him, and no opponent had ever called him feeble, he had mellowed, in fact, from a previous aggressiveness which was difficult to reconcile with his gentle submissive nature in Ronald's time When Mr Joe Devlin, the popular Irish Member, found it necessary to emphasise his views in the House to the extent of hitting someone — though he inadvertently knocked the wrong man down — a scuffle ensued during which Mr Devlin, bereft of his coat, was carried out under the direction of the Sergeant-at-Arms It seemed a most indecorous and painful incident, and Ronald held forth in this sense as he walked home with Bonar

'Do you think so?' was the reply 'The same thing happened to me several times in my early days'

It was because his experience had taught him how little the public interest really matters with the generality of men, if it should happen to run counter to self-interest, that Bonar valued brains more highly than superficial success

In this connection the following conversation occurred during a railway journey to the North, arising out of a recent access of scintillating brilliance by one of the greater scholars among his colleagues

'After all,' said Bonar to Ronald, 'what exactly are brains I would not put brilliance first of all?' He had a habit of putting a question in this fashion, and a reply was always forthcoming in some form or other merely to extend his own elucidation

'No,' suggested Ronald 'Judgment? Perspicacity? Precision?'

'Yes,' Bonar continued 'I think it was Sir Robert Walpole who

considered foresight one of the greatest tests of statesmanship, and who said that, next to patience, the most needed quality was a capacity to visualise in advance what the world's opinion would be of certain events after they had happened ?



And some years after Bonar's death, Ronald was sitting alone with Mr Baldwin. They spoke of Bonar, of this particular trait, and of his great friendship with Max Beaverbrook, a link which Mr Baldwin said he had never understood. Ronald referred to Bonar's admiration for successful achievement. 'I quite agree,' said Mr Baldwin. 'I was once talking to Balfour about that extraordinary friendship, he was a "big boy" then and I a very "small boy." I said I believed that Bonar's admiration for ability and success completely outstripped his concern as to the *method* by which it was achieved. "That," said A J B, "is quite possibly the explanation."

Had Mr Baldwin forgotten, or did he disapprove of, Carlyle's reflection that he had never known a really great man who was not able to be any kind of man?



Bonar's cynicism was the outcome of his extraordinary perception. It was ascetic, not censorious. He saw into men's minds because he had passed through every mental phase himself. If the Good Samaritan was moved to pity it was in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred because the beggar by the roadside might be useful to him either directly or indirectly, failing which, the beggar was cast away again without compunction, and while Bonar tolerated the ninety-nine cases he unerringly marked down the hundredth.

The most blatant form of these phenomena was snobbery, the most sheltered, subtlety, and the combination of both, diplomacy. To pretend otherwise, under the cloak of religion, charity, hospitality or patriotism, was mere hypocrisy. Self-preservation and the survival of the fittest were the heritage of human nature, but hypocrisy was a relic of emancipation from the beast. Civilisation, it would seem, had evolved in the human race an acquisitive capacity to speed up normal results. There were so few perches, so many birds of passage, and each was searching frantically to secure the best vantage-point for himself, so an *arrière pensée* had

become to human activity as the pilot fish is to the shark. And when a man said, 'I want a peerage to establish my superiority,' it was indirect, but the more usual formula, 'not for myself but for my wife,' was casuistry, and Bonar viewed both from his eminence beyond

And the reaction? Ronald felt it, and forthwith began to study the History of Honours as he had devilled the origin of Intelligence

CHAPTER 20

1921

ALTHOUGH MR ASQUITH ONCE EXPRESSED THE BELIEF THAT BONAR Law had an uninstructed mind, there can be little doubt that other giants like Winston Churchill, Lord Birkenhead and Lord Curzon were more disposed to agree with Lord Balfour, who confided to Ronald that Bonar was 'a statesman ranking with the greatest in our political records' In any case it can only be with the passage of time that his profound wisdom will be brought into just relationship with the conflicting issues of his later years

Ruminating one day after some striking example of his clear thinking, Ronald ventured to repeat the usual *canard* deplored the paucity of reserve in Government ranks for prospective Ministerial office Bonar immediately named five Members who, he said, were obviously destined for the Cabinet at no distant date, and added one isolated sixth They were all back benchers, who sat together below the gangway Their names were, Ormsby Gore, Walter Elliott, Sir Samuel Hoare, Earl Winterton, Walter Gunness, and the sixth was Edward Wood, to be better known as Lord Irwin, Viceroy of India, and now as Viscount Halifax

Bonar's prediction was not only absolutely right in each case, but came to pass as early as would have been possible had he been there to appoint them himself

He was failing badly now His spirit was unimpaired and his mental determination undaunted, but he had already suffered the loss of a wife and two sons killed in the War, and now his physique was withering

His medical advisers, Horder and May, his Parliamentary adjutants, Sir George Younger, Chairman of the Party, and Lord Edmund Falbot, Chief Whip, his close friend Max Beaverbrook, were all equally concerned, so Mr Lloyd George submitted Bonar's letter of resignation to the King

*On the 18th of March the King, away in Lancashire, wrote a long personal letter 'Your resignation is a grave loss to the Prime Minister, to your Party and to myself, and I am deeply sensible of

the loyal and devoted service which you have rendered me' This so affected poor Bonar because of its man-to-man sincerity, that Ronald telephoned Lord Stamfordham saying that a few hours' delay in acknowledgment would be unavoidable. And the following day, discarding a more regular draft reply submitted to him, he wrote an equally personal and typically modest note to the King

'It is a great delight to me to feel that my services in the trying times through which we have passed have been appreciated by Your Majesty, and it has been a great honour to me to be one of the servants of a Sovereign who has always set so high an example of devotion to duty'

Winston Churchill, the Colonial Secretary, who was in Egypt painting pictures, telegraphed his profound grief 'This is a very great blow to Country and to Government,' he said, but he did not come rushing home to compete in the turmoil of reconstruction.

Lord Edmund Talbot signed a circular letter convening a Party meeting on Monday, 21st March, at which Mr Austen Chamberlain was elected to the Leadership of the Unionist Party and of the House of Commons. Lord Edmund then faded away himself to become, as Viscount Fitzalan, Lord-Lieutenant of Ireland. During the week-end Bonar had left for the Riviera accompanied by his daughter Isabel, Lady Sykes, and his son Richard. Public feeling was summed up in a cartoon by Poy. Bonar is shown leaning out of his carriage window just as the Continental express is due to steam out. John Citizen clasps his hand, and with the other points to the door marked 1st Class. The caption says 'Just permit me to say, Bonar, that I endorse the opinion of the man who wrote that!'

On his arrival at Cannes he wrote to Ronald on that same Monday 'I want to tell you in writing what I said to you personally, how much I value the unselfish and affectionate help which you have given me. I feel quite light-hearted, but you were right in advising me at once to give it up, for I am sure I could not have gone on long.'

On the credit side, Ronald felt that Bonar was saved, inasmuch as a burden rendered infinitely more formidable by his own singleness of purpose had been removed. On the debit side, the departure of Lord Edmund Talbot coming at that moment, shortly to be followed by that of Sir George Younger on his translation to the

Upper House — two little men of pre-eminent distinction, who had come into Ronald's life and captured his admiration — left him with a bewildering sense of bereavement

Mr Chamberlain had a fine presence. He was indeed a handsome man with his face in repose, but his movements and enunciation lacked grace so that he gave the impression of a somewhat patronising condescension. As a family man all his personal charm, courtesy and affection followed their natural flow, but as an official they became stilted, artificial, and even disappeared. This may have been due in some measure to his defective sight, to self-consciousness, or to the traditional standard set by his famous father whom in many ways he resembled. His style seemed cramped, his method stiff and inflexible, his graciousness forced. There was a studied absence of pomp about him, but the apparent determination to suppress any pretension to aristocratic privilege invited attention, so that the critical observer, especially the Latin, was left wondering if perchance his judgment might be equally uncertain in other respects.

His deportment in the House of Commons was faultless, he belonged to the old school, now almost disappeared, whose tailoring was an essential property upon the political stage, who shot their white linen cuffs, and were immaculate in a fashion which varied as little as the Gospel according to the Church of England. With T P O'Connor as the veteran, he was the Senior Member of a very small band of individuals who still wore top hats, the correct usage of which involved a recognised ritual in the House of Commons. It was always used, for example, when a Member rose to put a point of order during a division. He generally sat with this tipped well forward over his eyes, a useful mask when commonly practised in former days to shelter the peaceful repose of back benchers, but he raised it always in punctilious acknowledgment whenever his name, or his office, was mentioned. When speaking, he used it ostentatiously as a waste-paper basket, emptying the contents before resuming his seat and his hat. Much play can be made with a silk hat in the House of Commons and to-day its loss is something of a misfortune.

Following immediately upon the arrival at No 11 of the new Lord Privy Seal, the Office of Works commenced operations on a considerable scale to render the premises decorative and suitable for domestic occupation. This generally occurred with each successive incumbent, quite irrespective of the probable duration of such tenancy, and provided a remarkable tribute to the good taste lavishly disbursed upon a property belonging to the Nation and maintained at the expense of the taxpayer. Fabrics and curtain of perhaps period design, wallpapers of Lincresta Walden and carefully designed fittings only recently provided, all of a quality to last for a generation or more in private circumstances, would change with the times and become ill-chosen for the official residence of another. They were accordingly replaced regardless of cost.

In this connection Bonar had made no claim whatever upon public funds, nor was he singular, but then a woman exercises not only her prerogative but also her feminine talent in such matters. She has views as to the appropriate setting for a distinguished public servant which constitutes a matter of public importance unesteemed by a bachelor or a widower less effectively supported.

Writing to Bonar at Cannes, Ronald said on this point 'In the meantime the old No 11 is being literally purged, and work goes on apace, that is to say, it makes up in volume what it lacks in speed. I am informed that Sir Lionel Earle, Permanent Secretary of the Office of Works, upon discovering that the drawing-room walls were to be stripped of their covering because excellence of condition is not sufficient justification for imperfection of shade, was only restored with some difficulty from his vain endeavour to resign.'

Later, he wrote again to Bonar describing how he invariably sought refuge in Miss Law's old sitting-room to deal with the daily King's letter. 'It is a document contrived with meticulous care for the diversion of myself (and I hope of His Majesty). It is animated, amusing, and narrates the occurrences in rival Conferences and Cabinets with a strict disregard of the assurance contained in its opening paragraph¹. Austen took his seat for the first

¹ Announcing a submission in regard to the House of Commons exclusively. The Sovereign received in addition a telegram every evening from the Government Whip, briefly reporting any outstanding event.

time as Leader [21st March] and was received with the customary generosity of the House on similar occasions In reporting this I had made what seemed to me a graceful and sufficient reference tempered by the (unexpressed) sorrowful loss of his predecessor Austen, however, redrafted the passage in greater detail but with less delicacy — “Mr C on entering the House, etc was greeted with loud cheers, supporters of the Government rising to their feet and waving their Order Papers, etc ”

‘Had he understood the King better he would I think have retained my less flamboyant version I determined thenceforth to leave a blank for his personal completion in the case of reference to himself, but when he quoted his own assurance to the House “Less than I have said I do not think it would be compatible with my duty to say, more than is absolutely necessary I am sure it would be unwise to say,” I regretted that my otiosity had lost me the selection of this oracular epigram ’

In days gone by the value of this daily form of communication was very real, for it provided the only convenient means by which the Sovereign could follow, by courtesy and not by statute, the successive steps in Parliament which led to his own approval of a Bill and its final Royal Assent But when T C Hansard began to print the Parliamentary Debates in 1803, they became more accessible, and when these copies were officially recognised in 1855, their production subsidised in 1879, and undertaken by Civil Service Parliamentary Reporters in 1909, the open sesame was complete The Press Reports in addition had developed an accuracy acceptable almost as evidence, so that Mr Chamberlain regarded the time-honoured custom involving these letters as redundant and farcical He went the length of suggesting their discontinuance, but he overlooked the fact that they still supplied an opportunity not always available for the transmission of intimate detail and the subtleties of personal points of view on all sides of the House which do not necessarily come to light in the ordinary course of debate

For instance, the King was known to read *The Times* daily from cover to cover He never missed a word printed in that revered and temperate journal He also followed parliamentary proceedings in Hansard with scrupulous care, so that a mere *précis* of what he already knew was burdensome, and when presently Mr Cham-

berlain wrote his own daily reports, this is exactly what they became. The King welcomed an unpublished personal aspect, he was interested for instance in the *sourdine* that Commander Hylton Young (now Lord Kennet of Dene), only just translated to ministerial rank from private membership, and replying for the Government in a Budget Debate (26th April, 1921), had acquitted himself with great ability, that after serving in the War at Antwerp, he lost an arm at Zeebrugge, and was shocked to find that on this account he was refused further service at Archangel, that he had accordingly requested, and was given, an audience of 1 heir Lordships at the Admiralty who received him with kindly but immutable composure. Whereupon he enquired if they were familiar with Trafalgar Square, had they ever noticed there an effigy of a little man at the top of a very tall column? 'That little man,' said he, 'was Nelson, who possessed not only one arm but also one eye, and yet the predecessors of Their Lordships would appear to have found him useful.'

On 4th April Mr Chamberlain took the oath and his seat on re-election for West Birmingham consequent upon his appointment as Lord Privy Seal. Three weeks after welcoming him in his new office the House was concerned with releasing its Speaker, whose retirement gave expression to three noteworthy pronouncements.

Mr Lloyd George, as Prime Minister, referring to Mr Lowther's period of service in the Chair during six Parliaments, disclosed the fact that his ancestors had been represented in the House of Commons for six hundred years. Mr Asquith in the course of a brilliant panegyric upon Mr Speaker's exceptional qualities, included among them 'an unfailing dexterity in the employment of the lighter as well as the heavier weapons in the dialectical armoury.' And Mr Lowther himself, in replying with his usual dignity, brought his speech to a close with the words always used by the Sovereign in concluding the speech from the Throne, 'I pray that the Blessing of Almighty God may attend you.'

A change of senior ministers must inevitably produce readjustments. Sir Robert Horne, President of the Board of Trade, succeeded Mr Chamberlain as Chancellor of the Exchequer and was himself replaced by Mr Baldwin, hitherto Financial Secretary to the Treasury, to whom J C Davidson was at once appointed Parliamentary Private Secretary.

Lieut-Col Leslie Wilson, successor to the office of Chief Whip in place of Lord Edmund Talbot, suggested to Ronald that he should stand for Parliament and offered to nominate him for a safe seat available in the West of England, but Ronald felt that the prospect of ministerial responsibility would be too remote and the doubtful value of a back bencher in the House, by comparison with the adulation bestowed upon him by his Constituency, was too equivocal While appreciating the proposal, he turned it aside He began again to contemplate retirement

He had an intense desire for experience in every available sphere, he felt the urge to create and consequently the temptation to seek out a task, but he had no worldly ambition or competitive sense, and there was a limit to adventuring in the public service Officials *de carrière* do not thank outsiders for jumping into their plum jobs, in spite of the fact that a Minister or Departmental Chief is at liberty to select his personal staff at his own discretion, and unless a 'usurper' consolidates his position, takes root, and becomes an institution, as Lord Stamfordham had done, he is playing with fire There were moreover younger men entitled to look forward to normal progress unencumbered by intruders So, when Ronald was also offered an attractive and responsible Departmental appointment, he declined it again, but before doing so, and because a complication had arisen, he consulted Mr Chamberlain

One very busy morning Ronald asked him if he would spare ten minutes later in the day to give him advice on a private matter, and Mr Chamberlain immediately banished all other considerations for an hour while he dealt exclusively with the problem as though it concerned himself personally and directly

Ronald explained his feelings about resignation and his reaction to the two proposals He said that in these matters he would scarcely wish to worry Mr Chamberlain at an inopportune moment were it not for an additional consideration

In view of the Prince of Wales's prospective tour to India and his consequent absence from England for a year or thereabouts, the Duke of York would be acting at home in his place, and his personal staff would have to be stiffened accordingly Representations had been made to Ronald and the appointment as Private Secretary to the Duke of York had already been offered to him

Mr Chamberlain appeared to be aware of this, but he considered the proposal with great care and kindness, devoting scrupulous attention to every aspect, and finally told Ronald that his duty now lay in that direction. Thus Ronald was duly gazetted Private Secretary and Equerry to the Duke of York following a letter written as early as the 23rd of August, by the Comptroller to His Royal Highness, explaining the position in these words

'The Duke of York desires me to offer you the appointment of Private Secretary and Equerry to His Royal Highness. The Duke's present Equerry is shortly leaving, and I am afraid the only emolument available is that laid down for an Equerry, which is £450 a year. It should be clearly understood therefore that the appointment is as follows

Private Secretary And Equerry	unpaid salary £450 a year
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This puts it on record that there is no emolument for the appointment of Private Secretary and that the £450 a year will be in respect of duties as Equerry that you may be called upon to perform.'

This was the first and only occasion upon which this point arose, and Ronald quite understood that while the Private Secretary would be unpaid the Equerry would receive, etc etc, but my reason for mentioning it is that the explanation revives an historical item of interest. The King had of course been consulted and had approved the appointment, but there was no precedent for a Private Secretary on the staff of the Duke of York, even though he be acting for the Prince of Wales. When the King was Duke of York he had not had a Private Secretary, he said, no more had any previous Duke of York, consequently neither pay nor allowances were available. Nevertheless, this was one of the most responsible positions that Ronald ever held. The possibility that the Duke of York might some day come to the Throne could not be discounted, because, although a very mediocre horseman, the Prince of Wales was riding with reckless courage both to hounds and over steeplechase courses. This fact provided one of Ronald's first anxieties, for the Duke was showing every inclination to emulate his brother's exploits.

Ronald found himself detailed for duty in attendance upon His Royal Highness at a series of evening functions, but at the earliest opportunity they dined together alone at Ronald's home, a practice which the Duke subsequently continued whenever possible until his marriage.

That night they discussed polo, racing, riding to hounds, and the coming season when the Duke was to hunt with the Pytchley. Ronald announced his intention of attending riding school again with a Cavalry Regiment. The Duke seemed surprised, but Ronald maintained that he had not been on a horse for years, and that if he was to hunt in the Shires as Equerry to the Duke it behoved him to be properly qualified, and he proposed leaving nothing to chance. He succeeded in impressing the Duke so well that they both went through riding school together with the Life Guards at Knightsbridge Barracks. They were bucketed around the *manège* week after week and Prince Albert acquired a thorough knowledge of the subject which revolutionised his previous views.

This completed the first step. The second was to dissuade him from race riding. Ronald contended that one jockey in the family should be sufficient. Since this was not convincing, he explained that the most attractive and appropriate steeplechase open to the Duke as an Officer of His Majesty's Forces would be the Grand Military. This met with approval and from that moment all other ideas were banished. With his little staff alone in the secret, the Duke began schooling himself quietly and thoroughly.

Then came the opening of the hunting season. They were to hunt from Pitsford Hall in Northamptonshire, where five Masters of Hounds had lived during the past hundred years, and which was now the home of George Drummond, more famous perhaps across a country than as the head of Drummonds Bank, celebrated in fact as one of the best men to hounds of his generation. He was to pilot the Duke and to be his host.

An annexe, approached from the house through a large music room on the ground floor, had been arranged on a former occasion to accommodate the Prince of Wales. It contained three bedrooms and a bathroom and this compact little suite was now at the disposal of the Duke, his valet and Ronald.

On the 23rd of November they left London for Belvoir Castle

where a house-party had been assembled by the Duke and Duchess of Rutland to welcome Prince Albert Hounds met at Croxton Park, a spectacular meet of the Belvoir hounds very familiar to Ronald in the days when he had hunted their country from Harlaxton

After that they went back to Pitsford Hall and settled down to a hard season with the Pytchley

On the 19th of December they were to hunt with the Belvoir again and arrived at Woolsthorpe the day before as the guests of Major Bouch, the Master They found as fellow-guests Mr Raymond De Trafford and Lord Ivor Churchill, but that night Brig-General George Paynter joined the party for dinner as he was to pilot H R H the next day Now George Paynter was a reputed steeplechase rider and, like George Drummond, one of the best men to hounds in the 'Dukeries,' so Ronald felt very easy in his mind Nevertheless, after dinner they conversed apart for quite a long time, and exchanged confidences about staff work on the morrow

Ronald was mounted for the day by Major Bouch, and hacked off to the Meet only three miles away on a horse aptly named 'Crack,' for — hot and fretful, through mutton-fisted usage — it started off yawning about beneath him, wrenching and tearing at his old wounded arm, and raking the whole way Prince Albert of course rode his own horses, and at the Meet changed to 'Sauce Box,' a splendid goer, and well up to two stone more than his weight Ronald was thankful to change here from his hard-mouthing relentless animal to a beautiful and perfect Belvoir type called 'Paul Pry,' on which the Master had hunted hounds himself, as clean and strong as whip cord, with the muscles literally rippling beneath his smooth and polished skin

The usual enormous field of scarlet and black, with a sprinkling of rat-catchers, awaited them at the eleven-o'clock meet The Master mingled for a while in the crowd greeting his friends, and then moved off to draw the coverts round Sedgebrook, the whole cavalcade following for perhaps a distance of a mile through the narrow lanes

On arrival at a field-gate leading to the covert he paused, and explained to Prince Albert both the draw and the probable run of the fox while his first whip cantered ahead Then with hounds

bunched expectantly round him, the Master trotted across the field followed by George Paynter, the Duke and Ronald, leaving the enormous crowd behind on the road, to be mustered and marshalled by its unyielding Field Master Breathlessly they waited there, at least Ronald says *he* did, while Major Bouch walked his horse carefully through the covert, the silence broken only by the sound of his own movements, by his modulated remarks to individual hounds, and by their response as they worked around him, nosing busily The feathering of a stern coming into view here and there, a shrill whimper verified almost at once by others, the Master's voice cheering them gently, the murmur of the Field back in the lane, their eagerness still curbed, and then the Master himself and the quick rustle of his hounds streaming out of the dense undergrowth

Now came a View Holloa from the First Whip, and they saw him waving his cap Major Bouch lifted his pack and pressed them, concerned firstly to clear them from the several hundred horsemen behind Then he cheered them on, and watched them swing and settle to a terrific pace, while he followed with the laggards, and Ronald caught one glimpse of the huge field thundering behind and spreading out fanwise

George Paynter, also anxious to get Prince Albert away from the crush, immediately set his horse alight and took a line Through an open gate they went and then a gap, George Paynter pointing his whip for direction and driving on at the same breathtaking speed across the grass, down towards a dip in the distance, and heading for a weak place in an uncut hedge Here his horse refused at the ditch towards him, and pulled up the other two Round came George Paynter, but only to run out again, and yet a third time He was riding an unfinished three-year-old

Ronald had a sudden vision of losing the pack, he could hear their cry drawing away to the left and the music softening perceptibly 'Let me have a go, give me room,' he shouted, as Prince Albert sat impatiently waiting 'Paul Pry' caught hold at once, boring for the ditch, and took the fence beyond with a tremendous jump Landing like a bird alighting from flight he placed each foot deliberately, and immediately acknowledged the sympathetic hold uniting him as he dropped, then he kicked back derisively, and changed as they swung instinctively to the left, pricked his

ears, asked for the bit again, and sailed over a five-foot 'cut and laid' as though it were a sheep hurdle

Prince Albert was following, hounds seemed to be vanishing away to their left front, so down into the hollow they went on George Paynter's line to a sweep of willows and an overgrown gully Slithering down the steep side of this, Ronald looked back before climbing the opposite bank, and saw 'Sauce Box' hesitating at the top This delayed them appreciably, and Prince Albert's coat was almost peeled off him by an overhanging branch, before they scrambled up the other side

It was more than twenty years since Ronald had ridden over this country and known it pretty intimately, but now he relied only upon his topographical memory He knew that he was making a point on the segment of a circle, and he knew where he was going, he knew also that hounds were not really running away from him, but only following a line on the convex side of his own But supposing the fox were headed, and swung left-handed? No, he would be more likely to turn this way, and then Ronald would hear or even see hounds in time to stop And supposing he led Prince Albert to an impossible obstacle? Supposing he miscalculated his line? But no, he could hear the sound of the distant pack still driving on at the same pace

Galloping between his fences, he found himself becoming apprehensive George Paynter would have known exactly what he was doing, he would have conjured up an expedient for any of these contingencies, and Ronald longed for something to happen which would terminate his growing anxiety

Each fence as it came back to him seemed to present an unjumpable appearance for Prince Albert following slightly to the left, and each time he looked back he was apparently going splendidly with confidence and reserve

At last the music came distinctly nearer, it grew in volume Hounds were evidently working up to their fox, and presently, poised in mid-air for the fraction of a second, he saw them, a dappled wedge-shaped body of waving sterns, rise, sink and disappear He heard them more and more continuously, he could see them now, carrying such a head they must be running from scent to view, they were closing in upon him When Ronald jumped into the last field but one — Prince Albert still keeping his

position behind — they were on terms with their fox, and all but rolled him over Ronald held hard and the Duke galloped in to see them pull him down and break him up at the finish Only five people were present to see that The Master was enthusiastic and lavish with his praise

It was then ten minutes to one

CHAPTER 21

1921-1922

IN 1921, ALEXANDER I OF SERBIA HAD BEEN BETROTHED TO PRINCESS Marie of Rumania, granddaughter of the Duke of Edinburgh, and great-granddaughter of Queen Victoria

King Alexander was the descendant of Karageorge, who had in 1804 succeeded in wringing from the Turks some measure of freedom for the Serbian people. In this ambition, however, he had a rival, a chieftain named Milosh Obrenovitch. Karageorge, or Black George, took life easily. Milosh, certainly less virile and perhaps more imaginative, bided his time, until, in 1812, he settled the matter by stabbing Karageorge in the throat, and cutting off his swarthy head, which he bartered to the Sultan for the perpetual governorship of his country.

The modern kingdom of Serbia was thus founded in a blood feud Obrenovitches and Karageorgevitches, according to the balance of local strength, ruled Serbia during the first half of the century. But the balance inclined in favour of the Obrenovitch line. In 1889, Milan Obrenovitch, the first king of independent Serbia, of whom little good can be written, abdicated in favour of his infant son, Alexander. After a short regency, Alexander in 1893 declared himself of age. In 1900, against the wishes of his supporters, he married Madame Machin (Draga, *nee* Lunyevica), a woman of peasant origin, ten years older than himself. This lady pitched her claims upon a dominant note. At her instigation, for example, the infatuated young King annexed certain municipal funds, and applied them to the building of a luxury yacht at Fiume. After a single experiment at sea, the Queen staggered ashore and forswore navigation for ever. The yacht was berthed at Ragusa, and relapsed into barnacled oblivion.

Party feeling revived, and the Obrenovitch dynasty lost favour. On a summer night in 1903 both King Alexander and Queen Draga were butchered in their night attire. After this brutal performance their bodies were hurled out of the window to lie naked and bloody until covered by the cloak of the Russian Minister,

M Mouravieff, who had witnessed the shocking scene from the window of his Legation across the Palace Garden

Thus ended the Obrenovitch regime, and to its place the distinguished House of Karageorge succeeded

Peter I (Karageorgevitch), the new Sovereign, had two sons, Petrovitch and Alexander. The former was taunted and baited for years, until at last he killed his valet, was clapped into a lunatic asylum, and in 1909 was persuaded to sign away his throne. He was thereupon succeeded by his younger brother, Alexander I (ninth of his line), whose marriage was to bring him into immediate relationship with every Royal Family in Europe.

At the English Court practically nothing was known of the Karageorge dynasty. But the alliance with the Rumanian Royal Family brought it into immediate connection with the House of Windsor. For this reason, King George V decided that the Duke of York should represent him at the marriage ceremony and that Ronald should accompany him as his staff.

This appointment made heavy demands on him. First, with so picturesque a background as was evidently being prepared in Belgrade, uniforms would be required, possibly every combination of uniform, but certainly no civilian clothes. Ronald consulted his tailor. He brought to light time-expired and obsolete equipment, gold-laced stable-jackets, long since superseded, sabretaches, and he rediscovered a shabrack. The Duke did likewise, but with the advantage that he was able to draw upon the Navy, the Army, and the Royal Air Force.

This however was not all. H.R.H. would be required to meet and to know all about many statesmen and notabilities, from all the old Balkan States and Slavonic races, the Croat, Slovene, Slovak, Czech, Pole, Lithuanian, Ukrainian, Estonian, Lett, Serb, Rumanian, Bosian, Herzegovine, Dalmatian, Bulgar, Greek, Macedonian, Albanian, Montenegrin, the Finn and the Turk in addition to those of the greater countries to be represented. Ronald was therefore expressly concerned to provide himself with a skeleton *Who's Who* for the information of his master.

. This was beautifully prepared by our Foreign Office. It comprised over eighty names under individual index numbers, and set out the salient feature of each official career. Every name was confined to a single flimsy slip measuring about 3" x 8" and all

these were bound together at one end for convenient disposal beneath a tunic sleeve

Ronald was not altogether ignorant of the ways and means of certain Balkan statesmen. In 1915 he had come to know M Mijatovitch, a distinguished ex-Serbian Cabinet Minister who had then presented his credentials at the Court of St James as Serbian representative. He was a very old man and intimate with one of Ronald's boyhood friends, to whom he persistently offered his trembling hand and tottering heart, so Ronald knew him well. One day he heard that a calamity had overtaken His Excellency, who was distraught. His gold star of the White Eagle had been stolen. Thinking to perform a graceful act, Ronald called at Spinks to enquire if by chance a similar star was to be had, and somewhat to his surprise he was immediately shown the required decoration. Expressing his satisfaction, he explained the circumstances, and was mortified to learn that this was in fact the Minister's Star, which he had himself brought in, to exchange for cash.

Apart from the tenacity with which H R H tackled his task of mastering the *curriculum vitae* of all these potentates, the long railway journey appeared to pass most profitably in the company of Their Royal Highnesses the Infante Alfonso and the Infanta Beatrice of Spain. The former was a host in himself, but he was also an experienced practical joker, so that, although he possessed a wealth of knowledge bearing upon ceremonial of the kind to be expected, one never knew if he was serious, and he carried his exalted inheritance with a grace and ease which at times became a positive danger to the unwary.

He was infinitely kind and helpful to Ronald, he would suddenly materialise in the least likely places at the first sign of an emergency — on one occasion he appeared in support of an inadequate supply of porters to shoulder luggage. No one recognised this muscular assistant as the Grandee of Spain who paraded only a few minutes later in full review order wearing the Chain of the Golden Fleece! His psychology, versatility, and comprehensive knowledge, from the cleaning of boots to the governing of a country, made him a most desirable partner in a difficult situation.

The first intimation that these two intended travelling to Belgrade upon the same train as the Duke of York was received at

Buckingham Palace with some dismay because their branch of the Spanish Royal Family had drifted away from Court favour, both in Madrid and London, so Ronald immediately went to the King and obtained his permission to stand by existing arrangements. The feeling may have been engendered in the lifetime of Queen Victoria when the Duke of Edinburgh, father of the Infanta Beatrice, became the Duke of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha, or it may have been due to the divergent views at the Spanish Court in regard to the Infanta Eulalia, mother of Prince Alfonso and aunt of His Majesty Alfonso XIII of Spain.

She was the most travelled, erudite, and consequently versatile member of a Court circumscribed by ancient privilege and etiquette, in excess even of the Hapsburg Court of Vienna. She welcomed contact with the leaders of European literature, art, and affairs of State, irrespective of party, so her breadth of view and vision were at least twenty years in advance of her time. When therefore she published a reasoned but absolutely innocuous series of essays entitled 'Au Fil de la Vie,' the old Spanish regime was scandalised, not so much by the subject-matter, which they probably never read, as by the fact that a Princess of the Royal House should descend to such publicity. Both the book and its author were stigmatised as Republican, the former was withdrawn from publication and the latter was ostracised from Spanish soil for a decade. The passage of time, however, broadened the outlook and healed the breach, while historic events amply justified her diagnosis of the life, movement, and pulsation of the body politic in Europe.

Whatever may have been the cause of apprehension as to the desirability of renewed contact between the Duke of York and these his cousins, it was ill-founded and at once dispelled, for Prince Ali (as he was familiarly called) and his wife were not only a charming pair, and infinitely valuable as travelling companions, but they also supplied a human element coupled with a shrewd accumulation of technical data culled from their own ancestral connection with the Courts of Europe.

The arrival at Belgrade at 7.30 in the evening of Monday, June 5th, was a signal for immediate ceremonial. H M King Alexander, accompanied by an enormous staff, was waiting to receive the Duke of York at the railway station. Ronald was attired in

the frock-coat of a Staff officer, and the Duke in No 3 Naval uniform The Guard of Honour was inspected, and presentations were made (of the King's staff numbering some twenty or thirty, and of the Duke's staff consisting of the solitary Ronald) Then they drove in state to the Konak (Palace)

The magnificent State carriages and cerulean blue liveries had apparently all belonged previously to the Hapsburgs, and had been acquired from the now defunct Court of Vienna, together with an unlimited quantity of gold plate, glass, linen, and banqueting equipment shortly to be displayed But even more pathetic was the discovery that the footmen, pages, outriders and grooms, wearing white wigs, tricorn hats, and theatrical state liveries, were almost all either Russian or Austrian refugee noblemen of high rank, and in many instances actually kinsmen of the exalted personages to whom they were now acting as lackeys These men had been persecuted, deprived of everything, and reduced to the humblest level of citizenship But now, 'plucked from the chaff and ruin of the times to be new varnished,' they supplied a back-cloth, after the cataclysm in Central Europe, against which the splendours of Belgrade stood out in vivid contrast, a shocking metamorphosis

The apartments into which the Duke and Ronald were conducted by the King himself consisted of three enormous rooms on the *rez-de-chaussee* communicating by double doors Each of these was capable of accommodating between two and three hundred persons in case of a reception, so that to walk from Ronald's room to the Duke's room by way of the intervening anteroom involved both time and patience There were, of course, offices, lavish in number, *en suite*, none of which had ever yet been occupied This new portion of the Palace was built in expectation of a State visit by the German Emperor, which, owing to the War, had never materialised The final touches had only just been completed, and left an atmosphere suggestive of plumbers and upholsterers, painters and putty, although regal magnificence was reflected at the first *coup d'œil*

There was unfortunately no time then, or even afterwards, for sight-seeing At 8 30 p m an 'intimate' dinner which meant uniform Therefore luggage all over the floor, unbearable heat, the selection of correct orders and decorations, then more ceremonial,

all in less than forty-five minutes Then dinner and comparative mental ease

Next morning, two successive parades, both in different uniforms, and inspection of the British Monitor *Glowworm* belonging to the British Danube Flotilla representing the British Fleet, then a quick change for luncheon at the British Legation, immediately after which the Duke of York received members of the British Colony At 3 p m arrival of H R H the Prince of Udine, representing the King of Italy, and at 5 p m the arrival by ship of the Rumanian Royal Family at the Port of Belgrade

In preparation for this item on the programme, and during the few minutes' interval available, both the Duke and Ronald were cooling off in their respective rooms prior to being decently dropped by drop into full-dress uniform Ronald was stretched, panting and naked, upon a large-sized bath-towel which looked like a lady's pocket handkerchief in the centre of his vast apartment The faithful Émile was agitating above him a large pepper-pot from which clouds of french chalk floated soothingly down upon the overtaxed torso Suddenly the motion ceased, Ronald opened a questioning eye, Émile was standing to attention, 'Monsieur,' said he with a slight inclination of the pepper-pot towards the distant end of the room, 'Monsieur, Sa Majeste,' and King Alexander of Serbia strode unconcernedly towards the bath-towel Then followed the most impressive ceremony of the whole visit, so far as concerned Ronald, for in his recumbent attitude, sheltering modestly behind a thin covering of french chalk, while Émile, the old soldier, stood unconcerned and respectfully rigid, he received from the King's hand the gold star of the Order of the White Eagle His Majesty was gracious, pleased, and apparently unconscious of any deficiency or abnormality in Ronald's attire, and as he withdrew, Ronald bowed from the waist while seated Turkish fashion upon his large white towel

The dignified arrival of the Rumanian Royal Family by water, escorted by other vessels, welcomed by 101 guns from the fortress of Belgrade, received by representatives of every reigning family in Europe and elsewhere, by the Patriarch, the Bishops, the Government and President of the Skupshtina and of every Municipal and Local Authority, was impressive and wonderful The Royal guests trooped on board and brought the Rumanian Royal Family

ashore, where they were presented with bread and salt. Then, after the inevitable speeches and technicalities, the procession returned to the Palace through crowds, and even greater crowds dressed in the picturesque multicoloured costumes of their respective districts.

That night there was a full-dress banquet, a gala dinner, in honour of the bride-to-be and her family, followed by choral singing outside the Palace.

Years ago, Ronald says, there was in London a quick-change artist named Frigoli who used to walk off the stage at one side and, apparently simultaneously, walked on at the other dressed as an entirely different person. The following day, the Duke and Ronald were subjected to intensive training and considered themselves qualified for a similar role. They appeared on nine separate parades in different kits. Fortunately both the luncheon and the dinner were *intime*, which means limited to members of Royal families, but as the Duke of York was the only representative there with a staff of one single individual, who moreover was housed with him in the Palace, Ronald was included in, and attended, all such functions.

After dinner there was a concert at which, apparently, everyone having the entree at Court was present, a full-dress occasion, and Ronald took up his position at the entrance to the raised dais, upon which would be seated the same Royal personages with whom he had just been dining, and directly facing the immense display of uniforms, ermine and feathers, jewels and decorations in the huge hall below.

The following day was a long and exhausting one because of the great wedding ceremony, conducted according to the ritual of the Greek Orthodox Church, which lasted from 10.30, the time of departure for the Cathedral, until the return at 1 p.m. During the service the Duke of York, who was *Koum*, which approximates to our Best Man with a prescriptive watching brief as future God-father, stood behind the King, and Ronald behind the Duke.

The King, the Duke and Prince Arsène (the oldest representative of the Karageorge family)¹ removed their swords, received

¹ H R H Prince Arsène Karageorgevitch was a brother of King Peter I of Serbia, uncle of King Alexander I and father of Prince Paul. During the Obrenovitch dynasty and the banishment, until 1903, of the Karageorgevitch

two lighted candles each from the Patriarch, which they held throughout the service, and finally the three distinguished bearers of the six guttering candles (for by that time it was no longer possible to hold them steadily) walked three times round a small table supporting the 'Sainte Evangile' placed in the centre of a raised platform upon which the bridal couple, the witnesses, and the officiating prelates had remained standing

Then came the slow State procession back to the Palace, the wedding breakfast, which lasted so long that only just sufficient time remained to change again into other uniforms for a full review of the troops at 5 p m , and lastly dinner which, although *intime*, was uncommonly like a banquet After this the poor bridal couple at last departed amidst scenes of the wildest festivity and popular enthusiasm to enjoy a period of peace

The return journey to England was accomplished without untoward incident, excepting that the pilot engine was stopped at the entrance to a tunnel on the Italian frontier because a bomb had been discovered on the line capable of destroying the whole train This was not intended for the Duke of York, however, but for the Prince of Udine, who was travelling with them

They came to Venice in the early hours of the morning and at dawn in the Italian Royal Barge they saw that ancient City of the Doges, of Titian, Tintoretto, and Paul Veronese, with her love-lost lagoons sleeping drowsily in delicate shades of pastel—a glimpse into the picturesque age of the past Nor had she emerged from her trance when they incontinently resumed their journey on the Orient Express

★

family, he was a refugee in Russia and fought as a Russian General against Japan in 1904, having first developed his military career in the French Army Subsequently he served during the Balkan War as a General in the Serbian Army He hated politics and Court life, was a fine old international soldier, very brave, with plenty of active experience and consequently, of course, an ardent pacifist He devoted himself to the purpose of abolishing war, lived modestly in Paris, and educated his only son at Eton and Christ Church, Oxford

Prince Paul inherited his father's dislike and developed an intense aversion to militarism He was born in St Petersburg, brought up as an Englishman, and was an habitué of the Marlborough Club in London His mother, a Russian, *née* Princess Aurore Demidoff of San Donato, died in 1904 The Duke of York conferred upon him the Grand Cross of the Royal Victoria Order

From the time of his leaving Downing Street, Ronald had been writing long reports, despatched regularly by every mail to his friend, Sir Godfrey Thomas, giving a political and official résumé of affairs at home for the information of the Prince of Wales while on his Empire Tour. Sir Godfrey replied with equally long and interesting descriptions of the Prince's doings, which were always shown to the Duke of York and sometimes passed to the King and Queen, but his last letter written from Manila on the 15th May arrived in England only just before the return of H M S *Renown*. On the previous day, H R H had received 'a nasty crack over the eye from a rising ball at polo which necessitated a few stitches and an injection of anti-tetanus stuff.' The medical faculty had insisted upon squirting in about 'two gallons,' with the result that when the inevitable reaction occurred during a dinner party on the *Renown*, and when the guests departed, for which there was great thankfulness, the Prince ceased to be himself and gave an admirable rendering of a man eligible to be put into irons. On the morning of writing, however, the effect had completely worn off. H R H was very well indeed, so — Godfrey Thomas was much relieved and wrote nine pages about the Philippines and about Japan.

The receipt of this letter and the return of *Renown* made it clear to Ronald that the Duke's responsibilities on behalf of his brother were now coming to an end, and that his staff should revert to its normal status. On the night of 18th July, therefore, the Duke, when going to bed, found the following note from Ronald upon his dressing table.

MY DEAR PRINCE ALBERT,

As it is now close upon a month since the return of the Prince of Wales, and as your own departure for Scotland will take place in about the same space of time, it seems to me that this is the moment when I might properly ask you to allow me to relinquish my appointment on the grounds that its purpose has been accomplished and that its continuation in these circumstances has little justification.

You will know, Sir, without emphasis from me that should you find it necessary on some future occasion to strengthen your staff again, I can think of no greater honour than that you should deem it possible to rely upon my devotion to yourself as you have already done.

I am, Sir, &c &c &c,

On the following morning the Duke was extremely disturbed, but, during a long and very intimate conversation, Ronald amplified the point of his letter. Nothing could be easier, he explained, or more desirable than to remain where he was, not only in a highly ornamental position but also in one much coveted, advantageous and sheltered, and no less gratifying to him on purely private and personal grounds because of the fast friendship between them.

Unfortunately, however, it seemed only too clear that so long as the Duke held no official appointment, any individual superfluous to his normal staff would be merely a passenger tacitly accepted by everyone, exposed to challenge by no one, but neither able nor expected to justify his existence. The difficulty was considerably increased, he said, by the knowledge that in spite of the emasculation which would inevitably befall the Duke's brilliant secretary, there was no precedent for getting rid of him excepting by an Act of God. It was extremely necessary, therefore, to be practical, and to make provision for the future healthy condition of the staff, in view of the fact that convention in the Royal Family frowned upon either the resignation or the dismissal of a servant. Both were *infra dignitatem*, because neither ever happened.

Prince Albert was disconcerted but smiled, and promised to present the case in this light to the King whose decision would, of course, be conclusive. At this moment, however, came a message requiring Ronald to wait upon His Majesty at once, so, diving into his frock-coat, he left the Duke anxiously awaiting his return because of the scolding in store, for it then transpired that Prince Albert had already shown Ronald's letter to the King.

This was plainly an occasion for admonishment. Discomfort, embarrassment and bewilderment followed until Ronald, wondering what he really had 'meant by it,' stood revealed not only as the first, but as a unique offender, since these things were not, and could not, be done. Innocence was stripped of virtue, and virtue left without merit until at last Ronald asked if he might explain himself, only to be reminded that it was precisely an explanation which he had been unsuccessfully invited to give ever since he entered the room. Ronald had stupidly failed to grasp the fact, but now he hastened to submit only two points. As His Majesty had just recalled there was no convenient method for getting rid of a

redundant individual on the Household Staff, except through his own misconduct, the individual had to create the opening for himself, which difficulty explained Ronald's own peccancy and provided its only excuse

The second point was more personal. As His Majesty would also remember, there had been no precedent for a Private Secretary to the Duke of York, and Ronald's appointment was governed by the temporary replacement of the Prince of Wales by the Duke of York. If Ronald selfishly retained his position in a grace and favour office without submitting, not a plausible offer to resign, but an actual resignation, he would be in danger before long of damaging the Duke's staff and becoming a dead weight instead of a live force. As this reasoning developed, the King became responsive and more gentle. 'What do you propose to do then?' he asked, and Ronald expressed the belief that in these days no man could be too well equipped in experience and knowledge to escort a Royal Prince, of whom more and more would be expected, through the modern maze of occupations both private and official. Thus he proposed to qualify for that honour himself by acquiring all the relevant experience available to him. If successful, he could imagine no greater privilege than to return to Prince Albert when required, and if not — then the Duke would be better served by his departure now, while on the crest of the wave.

To all of this the King listened most understandingly and then asked, as it seemed to Ronald, quite irrelevantly, 'What is Mr Bonar Law going to do?' Before Ronald could reply, for indeed, whatever answer there might have been was quite unknown to him, the King continued, 'Very well then, you had better remain with Bertie until you *do* get a job.' He then reverted to matters concerning Prince Albert and especially to a second visit to the Balkans now in prospect.

The long-deferred Coronation of King Ferdinand of Rumania and Queen Marie had been arranged for the autumn following the marriage of their daughter to the King of Serbia. Much of the ceremonial would be duplicated, and the Rumanian staff would thus be familiar to a great extent both with the technique and with foreign delegates. The official invitations had accordingly been issued for the month of October.

The Duke's personal success at Belgrade made it clear that he

would be cast for the same part during the gala days at Bucharest, and Queen Marie had given Ronald explicit messages to this effect which he was to deliver in her own words to King George

There were however two considerations involved which concerned Ronald closely. The first he submitted to the King at once for consideration if the second visit to the Balkans materialised Prince Albert's entry upon the international stage at Bucharest would be more compelling, he thought, if the staff in attendance comprised two British officers instead of only one, and the other officer would carry additional weight if he held senior rank in the Senior Service. Marshal Franchet d'Esperey, for example, had arrived in Belgrade representing France with a superb cavalcade of French Staff officers. The King said he would consider the point.

With regard to the second, Ronald could do nothing, but it worried him and it illustrates his own somewhat original and in this case probably unique method of producing results. When making preliminary arrangements for the journey to Belgrade he had visited an old acquaintance, Mr H M Snow, CBE, European Manager of the Wagon-Lits Company, and had obtained from him an estimate for delivering one Royal Prince, one Equerry, and two servants at Belgrade and back again in London on given dates with specified accommodation. The figure tendered being satisfactory, he added thereto an agreed percentage, and the Company further undertook to discharge all proper gratuities.

Three facts emerged as a result of this procedure. Sir Frederick Ponsonby, Treasurer to the King and Keeper of the Privy Purse, said that no member of the Royal Family had ever concluded so economical a journey. No question of gratuities arose anywhere, although better attention could neither have been offered nor desired, but finally, the real test of the experiment would surely come into evidence next time. Which left Ronald wondering.

CHAPTER 22

1922

RONALD WROTE TO ME AS FOLLOWS FROM BALMORAL CASTLE ON
24th September

' I arrived here early Friday morning on being shown to my room I was immediately extracted by the Duke of York and the Prince of Wales together They were starting off in half an hour with the King to shoot

' No sooner were they gone than I was sent for by the Queen and remained with her until lunch time, when I sat on her left and she resumed the interrupted conversation The others present were Princess Helena Victoria, the Archbishop of York, Lord Revelstoke, Lady Bertha Dawkins (Lady-in-Waiting) and Sir Sidney Greville (Groom-in-Waiting)

' Immediately after lunch we motored to a perfectly lovely loch about ten miles away Here the Queen invited me to walk with her for about two miles further to Glass-Ault Shiel, a cottage built by Queen Victoria in 1868, tucked away at the remote end of the loch, and now in the custody of a solitary caretaker just as the Queen left it, even the little green cushions on the slippery horsehair sofa remained as though still in use Princess Helena Victoria and the Archbishop of York, Sir Sidney Greville and Lord Revelstoke followed, and here we presently had tea, the only function required nowadays of this adorable little abode In the appropriately primitive cottage style the Queen helped us to scones, jam and tea out of a pewter pot all of which she had brought, and then asked us to smoke our pipes while she and Princess Helena Victoria regaled us with stories of the past about this funny little spot and its august mistress

' It was here that Queen Victoria used to sketch for days together and be read to by the hour Princess Helena Victoria was once reading aloud to her thus when the Queen suddenly interrupted and severely criticised Gladstone for mixing up politics and religion, "Well," said Princess Helena Victoria, "if I were the Queen I should put my foot down firmly!"

' "My dear," came the reply, "it is a very good thing for the country, in that case, that you are *not* the Queen"

"In similar circumstances the Queen denounced Lansdowne during the Boxer Rebellion in China. "He reminds me," she said, "of the story of a man with no knowledge of navigation who took his wife and family to sea and, when a storm overtook them, remarked — if this increases in force I shall have to take the helm myself!"'

'And again, she held very strong views about Abraham! Those with her, referred one day to the bosom of Abraham, submitting the reflection that even *she* might conceivably be faced with the necessity of seeking comfort thereon "My dears," was her rejoinder, "the conduct of Abraham was in our opinion not altogether satisfactory! We shall *not* meet Abraham!"'

'And so on, until long after tea we motored back just in time to dress for dinner. We arrived as the King was dismissing his head stalker and I was standing by his side under the carriage porch as he was giving his final directions about the next day's shoot. The Highlander stood silent until the end and then, remarking "Na, na, we'll du nane o' that," swung round on his heel without further ado, but the man who said that would probably give his life ten times over for his Royal Master!'

'If you have ever read about the old Queen's faithful servant John Brown and followed the peculiar technique of his terminological abruptness in addressing her, you will not be scandalized, nor interpret this as anything but the candid ungarnished directness of a Highlander's speech.'

'At dinner I sat on the Queen's left again. There were fourteen at table. The King and Queen, the Prince of Wales and Duke of York, Princess Helena Victoria, the G O C Scottish Command, the Archbishop of York, Major Ramsay (the factor, and brother of the Duchess of Atholl), Lord Revelstoke, Colonel Erskine, Captain Hardinge, Lady Bertha Dawkins (in attendance), and finally Sir Edward Lutyens and myself. After dinner the King's pipers marched twice round the table to their own mournful music, and I had a long talk with the King until he retired with the Queen. I was not slow to follow that example.'

'Do you know about this, Balmoral, estate? It was acquired on Lease in 1848 and bought in 1852. In those days the house must have been typical of the simple and rather spartan Scottish home. Considerable alterations and additions were made

and the present granite Castle was completed in 1854. The woodwork and furniture for the most part are of maple and birch, the carpets are designed with the Royal Stewart Tartan or the green hunting tartan, while the curtains and upholstery, of the aforesaid dress tartan, in poplin, complete the motif. My bedroom, however, the room in which I am now writing, provides an exception as to its carpet, curtains, and covers, which display the less colourful Balmoral tartan (created for and instituted by the late Prince Consort) — rather bizarre and perplexing to an English eye but all very emblematic of the Scot because there are so many fine points about it! — the half-tester maple wood bedstead is followed *en suite* by the remaining articles of furniture and, atmospherically, by the wallpaper and pictures.

'Yesterday I was awakened by the King's pipers again playing under my window. At 9.30 the Prince of Wales, the Duke of York and I motored to Mar Lodge and I had eight hours' deer-stalking on the finest forest in Scotland, 300,000 acres. The Prince and I were together and the Duke of York was alone with his stalkers on the opposite side of the Valley. We all three met again finally and returned to Mar Lodge for tea at 7.15 with the Princess Royal and Princess Maud. They showed me the ballroom there, decorated with 3,000 stag heads, the greater number of which were killed by the late Duke of Fife.'

'Last night the same party at dinner as before, excepting that the G O C Scottish Command had left in the episcopal car with the Archbishop of York. I sat beside Princess Helena Victoria and spent the rest of the evening with the King alone, until he went to bed, which example I was again not loath to follow after a very exacting day in my present unaccustomed condition.'

'To-day we attended service at Craithie Parish Church, a sufficiently ordinary proceeding yet rather a memorable sight here. Everyone wore the kilt. The King and Queen, Prince of Wales, Duke of York and Princess Helena Victoria in the front pew of the wing which forms their own little chapel, Lord Revelstoke and I in the second, Lady Bertha Dawkins, Colonel Erskine and Captain Hardinge in the third. We all lunched at Mar Lodge with the Princess Royal, after which the King and Queen returned here, the Prince of Wales and Duke of York went off to tea with the Head Stalker, while I, with Colonel Erskine, called upon Sir Derek Keppel and Lord Stamfordham'

'To-morrow I am to be out all day stalking with the King and the Duke of York, and on Tuesday I leave for London with the latter

'On reperusing the above I find I have touched upon none of the points which I really intended to write about, but time is against me'

And he kept a separate note of certain very important conversations

The following day the King started out with the Duke of York and Ronald. The sequel provides an example of the unexpected mellowness sheltered beneath the King's 'quarter deck' manner. On arrival by motor at a distant burn they separated and set out in different directions, the King alone with his stalker and gillies, the Duke and R. with theirs. The latter were almost immediately engaged in spying a herd of deer far away on a mist-covered mountain and debating the ways and means of a likely approach.

After the usual expected vicissitudes — exasperation, hope and final success — the head stalker brought the Duke up to a really noble six pointer. Prince Albert was level with the stalker's knee and looked back to R., just behind, for his opinion. All three had done a difficult crawl, all three had scrutinised the head through glasses, and all three were in agreement, so the Duke killed his stag seven hours after the start.

Immediately after dinner two films were to be shown by command for the entertainment of their Majesties and the Balmoral Household. They were 'Through Three Reigns' and 'Nanook of the North'. Afterwards the King withdrew and R. was left alone with him as before. An opening soon occurred when he could describe the day's long stalk, he expressed the opinion that His Majesty would be pleased with the stag when he saw it the following day, and would consider it a very shootable head.

Political storms seemed to be gathering in the Near East and threatening clouds were hovering over the Balkan States during the earlier days of October, but no alteration was made in the

programme for the forthcoming Coronation on the 15th So on 9th October the Duke of York left London for Bucharest with Ronald and Admiral Henry H Campbell (Groom-in-Waiting to the King) in attendance

The next day they were joined in Paris on the Simplon-Orient Express by their previous travelling companions the Infante Don Alfonso of Orléans and the Infanta Donna Beatrice, otherwise Prince Ali and Princess Bee, and in adjoining carriages of the same train were Marshal Foch and General Weygand with over thirty Staff officers, to represent France The added authority and presence of Admiral Campbell was therefore amply justified at the outset, but was effectively demonstrated a few days later in serio-comic manner

The King and Queen were holding a reception of the *corps diplomatique* and members of the Foreign Missions, a gathering of consequence On a raised dais in the throne room Their Majesties were grouped with all the royal visitors, some nineteen persons, waiting to receive the cream of distinction and elegance, the ambassadors, marshalls, diplomats, and courtiers who were to be presented It seemed obvious to the Admiral and to Ronald that the two of them would take seniority of place, and they looked for some manifestation of this proper procedure from our Minister to Rumania, Sir Herbert Dering When no such evidence was forthcoming either from the Court officials or anyone else, and the ante-room was packed full, and the double doors to the throne room were being thrown open, the situation looked desperate British prestige was tottering, something had to be done So as usual the British Navy rose to the occasion

Admiral Campbell, a tall, distinguished and quite imperturbable figure, strode with R to the entrance doors and planted himself athwart the imposing threshold, adopting there a significant attitude which meant *entree interdite*, while R, disregarding the paramount Princes assembled on the dais, and the astonished potentates behind the British Admiral, clanked into the middle of the throne room and accosted the Court Chamberlain thus 'H R H The Duke of York takes precedence as representative of His Majesty the King of England You will therefore announce the members of his staff first' As he swung on his heel Admiral Campbell advanced to meet him with the typical sangfroid of his

Service, and, without being announced at all, they both marched across the vast apartment and paid homage before the royal dais, to the very considerable amusement of everyone upon it, encouraged of course by the irrepressible Prince Ali of Spain

There was a moment's pause which enhanced the effect and during which Court officials recovered their balance. The long and distinguished procession was then shepherded into the Presence Chamber and out again, on the completion of presentations made with striking ceremonial, while Admiral Campbell and Ronald had stationed themselves behind their own young master on the dais.

Although this incident occurred after the Coronation ceremony it falls naturally into place beforehand to indicate the value of inter-Service collaboration.

For years previously as a result of the Great War the Popular Assembly had proclaimed the Union of Transylvania with Rumania at Alba Julia, the ancient capital of the Roman province of Dacia. A miniature cathedral and cloister had been specially constructed in the old citadel overlooking the town, now little more than a village, and it was here that King Ferdinand and Queen Marie were to be crowned.

The Royal Family had arrived over night from the Palace of Sinaia with the Duke of York, the Duke of Genoa (Italy), the Infante Alfonso of Orleans (Spain), Prince Paul of Serbia, Marshal Foch, etc., who all drove up to the Citadel in State carriages at ten o'clock, followed by the King and Queen, the Crown Prince and Princess and the other Princesses. But the ceremony was marred by rain and by the elaborate precautions taken, much to the distress of the Magyar population who were largely excluded, because of a recent plot directed against the lives of Their Majesties. The Hungarian Government, indeed, had refused the Rumanian invitation and their Minister in Bucharest had asked for leave of absence during the Coronation celebrations.

The Cathedral service opened with a Mass conducted by the three Metropolitans of Bucharest, Jassy and Sibiu. Under a magnificent canopy of purple and gold, supported by six halberds, stood the King and Queen, he in uniform and she in a crimson velvet robe trimmed with ermine and gold. The King placed upon his own head a crown fashioned from the metal of Turkish guns.

taken at Plevna He then crowned the Queen with a crown of similar design but wrought of pure Transylvanian gold The Coronation robes were then placed upon their shoulders, and they turned towards the cloisters while the purple canopy was borne above their heads by six General officers And the Royal personages behind and around them opened out to let them pass through, including the Duke of York, Prince Ali, and Prince Paul, so that Admiral Campbell and R , who had been standing immediately behind them, were left conspicuously alone, for they did not move aside On the contrary, Admiral Campbell took a step towards the advancing Queen She held out her hand to him, he took it on his own and, bending over it with the gallantry of an old-world courtier, he was actually the first person to offer, after her Coronation, the homage of himself and of his country Then he drew to one side, and R to the other, while Their Majesties passed on

That night was spent in the train and after a twelve-hour railway journey the State entry into Bucharest started at ten o'clock next morning from the Mogoshoara Station King Ferdinand, alone, led on horseback, followed by Prince Carol, the Duke of York, the Duke of Genoa, the Infante Alfonso, Prince Nicholas and Marshal Foch, all six of them abreast Then General Weygand and Ronald alone, then other notables, followed by their gentlemen-in-waiting, staff officers and a brilliant posse of Rumanian generals After these came the Queen, the Queen of Serbia, the Queen of Greece, the Princesses and the dismounted Royalties and suites in State coaches

The route lay along the Kaléa Victoriei, through triumphal arches, amid wonderful popular demonstrations, to the Cathedral where the Te Deum was sung At this point the immense enthusiasm was again saddened for the King and Queen, not so much by the heavy rain which continued relentlessly, as by the official news, publicly suppressed, that, following a long list of lesser disasters, two serious railway accidents had just occurred involving considerable loss of life There seemed to be an atmosphere of dejection overhanging these several days of national holiday and rejoicing, which was not due to the weather alone The whirlwind of gaiety, the gala banquets, parades and performances failed to dispel this feeling which continued to the end That night there was another State Banquet at the Cotroceni Palace, followed by a command

performance, at the National Theatre, for State guests only. The Duke of York sat between the Queen and Princess Ileana in the Royal Box, with Admiral Campbell and Ronald just behind them.

Officially this was the last item on the programme, but the real family dinner was held on the night of the 18th, the *diner intime*, and the modest menu after the previous heavily loaded lists would establish its personal nature apart from the small company present. Having arrived at the item shown as *Bavaroise au Nougat*, Prince Ali sent his menu card round to R. On the back is written,

'TO DR AQUA-CASA

The Dean of Wagon-Lits would take a glass of wine with you '¹

Prince Ali raised his glass 'Au bon cavalier,' said he, and held the table. The allusion had reference to an episode that afternoon which might have ended less satisfactorily.

On the Bucharest Racecourse the *elite* and the multitude had gathered in thousands to see the Queen ride out past the Grand Stand, in the Hussar Uniform of her own Regiment and followed by all the State guests and officials, into the country beyond where she was to review the Coronation troops before dispersal. The Grand Stand was packed even more densely than it had been on the previous day when the Royal Party had attended the Races to see the *Prix du Couronnement* run.

The Queen mounted her beautiful dappled grey charger in the Paddock, and moved out alone followed by the head of the procession several lengths behind her. As she turned into view on the Racecourse a terrific outburst of cheering greeted her.

Ronald's horse broke ranks, plunged violently and the offside bridoon-rein broke — there was only a single rein — then it reared and plunged again. Several officers in the cortège shouted 'Dismount,' and thus focused attention upon him. As R shortened his surviving rein and disengaged his stirrup irons, he slipped off quite neatly on the near side, and being in full-dress uniform, the action no doubt looked spectacular, but he walked back gloomily, unhorsed and unhappy, leading his mount and cursing its harness.

¹ For some reason the Infante Alfonso of Spain has always called Ronald 'the Doctor.'

Very soon however he found Mr Green, the English stud groom of the Royal Mews, holding a very fine chestnut stallion, the Crown Prince Carol's charger. Prince Carol had not paraded. A previous link had been established between R and Mr Green, as a British ex-cavalryman, so R rode out again and being a long way behind had the whole field to himself as he cantered up the Racecourse, and passed the Grand Stand on the superb chestnut charger, until he resumed his place behind the Duke of York 'Bon Cavalier,' murmured the Princes, and that is why Prince Ali named the toast at dinner.

Two days later they were crossing the Italian frontier on the return journey to England when news was received on the train announcing the fall of the Coalition Government on 19th October, in England.

The Comptroller of the Duke's Household was awaiting their arrival at Victoria Station, and immediately conveyed the King's wish that Ronald should proceed at once to Mr Bonar Law's private house, a Household car was waiting for the purpose. But the incidental *déssous* of staff work is sometimes apt to escape an exalted personage. The King could scarcely have realised that Ronald must necessarily render an itemised account of expenses to the Controller of the Privy Purse, and return a valuable collection of orders, decorations, and presents, reporting particulars of the recipients of these Honours.

Discovering therefore that instead of going off as directed, Ronald had returned to the Palace, the King sent for him. Mr Lloyd George and Mr Bonar Law had each been received in audience and, by request of the latter, Ronald was to take up his duties with the new Prime Minister immediately on his arrival in London. H M wanted to know why he had not done so.

Ronald gave the King a vivid description of the Duke's second mission to the Balkans, the more detailed analysis of which reflected both the sagacity and the personal success of Prince Albert. He then took leave of His Majesty.

CHAPTER 23

1922-1923

AS HE DROVE TO ONSLOW GARDENS RONALD REFLECTED UPON THE melancholy contrast between the scenes which he had so recently left and the prospect now before him Bonar had been so pitifully anxious to be left alone when he retired His political life had come to an end, and he knew that physically it was drawing to a close, but Sir Max — as Lord Beaverbrook was called familiarly — had held a pistol to his head until not only his heart but his body was to be finally broken by the cares of office

Among the many services to the State, notwithstanding disclaimers, which Lord Beaverbrook has rendered, I doubt if he has done anything of greater value than to keep that modest man Bonar in harness as long as he did And because of his love for him I doubt still more if he will ever live down the personal sacrifice which it cost him to do so He knew that Bonar had the instinct in statecraft to sense the most hidden entanglements, to foresee the eventualities of a decade, that he had a generous touch and great sensibility combined with the strength to steady a temperament like Lord Curzon's Three times Ronald had seen Lord Curzon weep on Bonar's shoulder

Not so long before, Clemenceau was walking up and down the terrace of No 10 with Mr Lloyd George when Bonar joined them

'We have just been discussing Gladstone What a great man that was,' said Clemenceau, placing a hand on Bonar's shoulder, and Bonar replied, 'But all great men are fools'

And Clemenceau, who began as a journalist and ended as 'The Tiger' among French statesmen, devoted himself finally to reading political history which revealed, he said, that 'most Statesmen are rogues at heart' When he retired in 1920 Bonar wrote to him

'One of the incidents in connection with the War which I have most greatly prized, has been the opportunity of making your acquaintance, and of regarding myself as one of your friends

'In the last and most critical phase of that terrible struggle,

you not only spoke for France, but as it seemed to me — a view which I feel sure History will confirm — you were the incarnation of the soul of your Country, and although I deeply regret that yours will no longer be the directing hand, yet I cannot but feel that you have made a glorious exit from the stage which during these years has been filled by your personality ’

This letter then continues on a more personal note

The psychology of these two men was strangely similar, although so differently expressed

The supreme difficulty in human life is the attainment of mental balance The easier, the more dubious possibly, the pathway to success, the more likely is the individual to lose that balance The highest peak to be surmounted is self-abnegation, yet a disinterested act of devotion invites scepticism, and the cloak of anonymity is suspect

Ambition, the desire to succeed in any undertaking, is good jealousy, the instinct to yield no ground, legitimately come by, is better and vanity, the pride of tradition, possession or delegated power, is best of all But magnificent fundamentals of character as these three qualities are there is no precept to define or circumscribe them They are therefore prostituted to individual expediency and while all men hold them sacred yet each man transgresses them with moral serenity, for, as Burke said of day and night, ‘No man can tell precisely the exact moment when the daylight fades into darkness, but the difference between night and day is clear enough ’

Thus was Bonar’s philosophy expressed in his Rectorial Address at Glasgow in 1921 and thus had he soared beyond the uncertainty of human things

The business of life becomes a gamble in the mart in which each man peddles his wares subject to a very flexible code of rectitude Some are sufficiently well equipped, even with astuteness, to veil their particular weakness to the end, others with equal cunning contrive to disclose it, but the majority openly name their price or permit it to be discovered Thus the competitive struggle continues The largest plum growing on the highest branch of the tree is the one most coveted, yet the sweetness of the topmost plum is sadly over-estimated and its value grossly exaggerated The man who cannot enrich, ennable, and entertain himself in the remain-

ing parts of his garden is a fool Thus thought Bonar and — ‘all great men were fools’

As Lord Privy Seal, Bonar had been all-powerful His friends were everywhere When he resigned he left an important commission in Ronald’s care ‘Do not delay too long,’ he said, ‘because my influence will not last more than three months’ Within three weeks he was a ‘backnumber,’ his light had waned, and the password of his name was failing to work When he returned as Prime Minister the flood tide of friendship flowed again as surely as it had ebbed before, but this time Bonar was proof against illusions For in the rush of modern civilisation a friend is a friend to no one but himself In the recognised sense a man’s friends include his brother officers in the combatant services, his colleagues in the official world, his contemporaries in commerce, and half London in Society But if he gets into difficulties, they either excuse themselves or help him according to opportunity For the most part they are secretly gratified to see the end of him, because, in the scramble for place, a vacancy is no less valuable than a change

But there are exceptions The case of Max Beaverbrook provided an example, for while Bonar clung to the counsel of Polonius

‘The friends thou hast and their adoption tried
Grapple them to thy soul with hoops of steel,
But do not dull thy palm with entertainment
Of each new hatched unfledged comrade’

and his perspicacity remained unimpaired, yet his generous heart knew no reserve and gave full measure in return for loyalty and affection which followed him to the end

Ronald had come to know him very intimately He had lunched with him alone almost every day during the Recess as well as during the Sessions of Parliament, and had thus accumulated a good deal of knowledge relating to his early years, his ambitions, philosophy and his conclusions on life

One day early in 1921 Ronald had been alarmed by Bonar’s habitually mournful expression It seemed even more pronounced than usual and very tentatively he suggested some perfectly innocuous current affair as the possible cause ‘Oh, no,’ said Bonar, ‘it is only that Rectorial Address hanging over me’ In view of his

capacity for making a cocked-hat speech on any subject at a moment's notice, and as the fixture in question was still several weeks ahead, Ronald began to chide him gently 'But this is no ordinary speech,' insisted Bonar, 'it is a classic'

Ronald occupied himself forthwith devilling every Rectorial Address ever delivered, including the famous exhortation by Burke and the written but undelivered composition by Asquith. Thoroughly saturated with the style and standard required, he then prepared notes in anticipation of Bonar's next relapse, hoping perhaps to supply some stimulus to inspiration. He related the substance of his ideas during lunch and was duly thanked in the usual wistful manner. A day or two later Bonar asked if Ronald had done anything about his Rectorial Address, and Ronald, feeling rather crestfallen because apparently his previous suggestions had proved worthless, volunteered his remaining stock of material. Again, a few days and again the same performance, but this time Bonar said, 'We will call it "Ambition"'.

Then, without further reference to the subject, Bonar dictated his complete address in three parts and apparently forgot it. The original pencil draft of Ronald's notes, the address as dictated by Bonar, the verbatim report as he delivered it without a single note, differ only in punctuation and minor variations.

Ronald was thus reviewing memorable reflections concerning this most unusual man, when the short drive ended and he was abruptly awakened out of his reverie. He had arrived at Bonar's door.

During the long conversation which followed a question arose as to the appointment of a successor to Sir Almeric FitzRoy, Clerk to the Privy Council. This was a subject upon which Ronald had been able to test the King's inclination at Balmoral. According to a memorandum made at the time he represented that the Privy Council with the Sovereign at its head was still technically the ruling authority, and that the Cabinet was in fact, though not necessarily in practice, a sub-committee of the Privy Council, and the Committee of Imperial Defence a sub-committee of the Cabinet. He had therefore developed the theory that in the case where, owing to a crisis or a General Election, His Majesty's Government might be temporarily dislocated the affairs of State would still continue under the constitutional direction of the

Sovereign in Council, notwithstanding the non-existence of a Cabinet

Ronald repeated this conversation to Bonar that evening, adding that if this reasoning were correct the ideal solution might perhaps be found in an appointment whereby the Clerk to the Privy Council should also be the Secretary to the Cabinet and to the Committee of Imperial Defence, on the principle of the greater including the less. As Sir Maurice Hankey held the two latter offices, his succession to the former would provide that result.

Bonar agreed with all this and submitted in that sense to the King. So Sir Maurice Hankey's appointment correlated the cog-wheels of this constitutional machinery which thus remained synchronised until his retirement in 1938, when the earlier system was re-established.

Ronald had now resumed his old position with Bonar and on the 25th October went to Glasgow with him. Parliament was dissolved on the 26th and the General Election resulted on November 15th in the Unionists holding 344 seats, giving Bonar Law a majority over all other parties of 73.

Then a move was made into No 10 Downing Street and Mr Baldwin, who became Chancellor of the Exchequer in the new Cabinet, took up his official residence at No 11. It was therefore extremely convenient for him to devote much of his available time to Bonar as he took pleasure in doing. Every morning after breakfast it became his custom to look in on his way through No 10 to the Treasury, and Bonar, a creature of habit, and extremely sensitive, expected him.

One morning Mr Baldwin looked in at Ronald's door and asked, 'How is he?' Formerly he would have gone into Bonar's room without waiting to enquire. 'Go up and see him,' said Ronald, and afterwards he wrote 'Ten minutes later I found Bonar with his legs crossed over the arm of his chair, and the Chancellor pulling moodily at his pipe, as he polar-boreed up and down the opposite side of the room, but temperamentally they had drifted miles apart. I don't believe that either had spoken a word. My entry opened the door to Mr Baldwin's escape.'

To Ronald, they never appeared to be at ease together again. Concurrently with the anxiety over the Debt negotiations two

other problems no less disquieting to Bonar had loomed up, namely, the Conference at Lausanne on the Near Eastern position, and a simultaneous Inter-Allied Conference in London, to be continued as from the first of January in Paris, upon the question of Reparations.

As a result of the complete defeat of the Greeks at the hands of the Turks under Mustafa Kemal, peace parleys between the Allies and the Turks opened in the late summer. After the fall of the Coalition Government and Bonar Law's entry into office, negotiations were resumed at Lausanne. In November, Lord Curzon, still Foreign Minister, set out to meet the plenipotentiary of the triumphant Turks, Ismet Pasha.

It was amidst these same disturbing conditions that Bonar sent his Chancellor to Washington to deal with the American debt, and that he himself received in London the plenipotentiaries of France, Belgium and Italy (Poincaré, Theunis, and Mussolini), to find a solution of the German reparations problem.

Ronald came into daily contact with each of these three, but he focused his attention particularly upon Mussolini, who had become Premier of his country only the year before. Representing Bonar, he received him on arrival in London and drove him to Claridge's Hotel. He returned there with him day after day at the conclusion of the meetings at No 10, during which Mussolini consistently maintained a studied silence '*Faut pas trop de panache*'. He told Ronald, '*Faut pas être trop flamboyant*', adding that he was personally more concerned in assimilating the method of the Allied Governments. And this great idealist was perceptibly impressed by the modesty of No 10 Downing Street, and the sincere candour of Bonar Law.

His pungent comments during these brief interludes were illuminating. Poincaré he found *aimable*, but precise, unimaginative and *entête*. Lord Curzon, emotional but frigid, imperative, unyielding, and even inflexible. But Lord Curzon, monopolised as he was at Lausanne for nearly three months, had left the question of reparations exclusively to Bonar. Mussolini, a student of finesse, had 'discovered' both Lord Curzon and Poincaré at Teritet when the three representatives of the principal Allied Powers were preparing for the opening session of the Lausanne Conference on the 20th of November.

Bonar Law had watched Mussolini's rise to power, the threading of his way between so many dangers, the dramatic triumph, after symbolising his rejection of the past by firing the offices of his former paper, *Avanti*. Bonar liked all this. He liked Mussolini because in the words of Lloyd George, 'he respected success, not as success, but as a fact'. For it certainly appeared that Mussolini had restored idealism to an ancient race, and had extracted Italy from the same anarchy which had mutilated Russia, by teaching discipline, sacrifice and work.

The Italian Ambassador, the Marchese della Torretta, said to Ronald, 'If you go to say "good-bye" to him when he leaves, you will see the vitality of him.' When that day came there were hundreds and hundreds of his black-shirted compatriots at Victoria Station. He changed instantly from the demure, almost resigned appearance of the past few days. He sprang to action, his rapid husky voice rasped out a string of sentences, his tense lips quivered with energy, and his penetrating dark eyes became savagely bright. He seized the fringe of their Fascist flag with a dramatic gesture and kissed it. Then he bade farewell officially to Ronald. His whole expression changed again to an almost sensitive intimacy as he whispered, '*Vous voyez que ce n'est pas la même chose!*'

Bonar was attracted by this natural force. His Canadian Calvinistic purity of purpose found no room for reverence of merely nominal aristocracy or tradition in these exacting days, but only of the best which they could contribute. His Scottish caution made him distrust any speculative radical change, and he understood the method by which Mussolini apparently advanced step by step, and relinquished his hold of the one position only when he had a firm grip of the next.

Lord Curzon, on the other hand—the Patrician—would find it wellnigh impossible to understand how a Divine Power could reconcile the destiny of forty million people descended from the Caesars, with the mastership of a blacksmith's son. Lord Curzon believed implicitly in Divine Right, because he believed that he himself was born to rule.

At Lausanne Ismet Pasha, flushed with recent success, disputed every point, but as the British Government maintained its position in Mesopotamia under mandate from the League of Nations—an

obligation incidentally which Bonar consistently deplored — no other Power could authorise surrender or modification of existing conditions. So Lord Curzon used all his eloquence to tranquillise the Turkish delegation, the Allies made every concession possible, exhausting both argument and persuasion, while Ismet Pasha appeared as anxious as anyone to conclude a treaty and yet remained adamant.

When Lord Curzon finally came home early in February he described to his colleagues in the Cabinet how he had continually endeavoured to expedite the result. He recited with dramatic gesture how at last he played his most compelling card, when week after week all his diplomatic skill had failed to contrive his return by the end of the year. ‘Gentlemen, my Sovereign is greatly concerned by my prolonged absence from home, and His Majesty’s Government are continually expressing their anxiety for my return. I am constrained therefore to impress upon you the extremely urgent necessity of presenting your reply so that my arrival in London may be assured by the 11th of January, the anniversary of *my birthday!* But,’ continued Lord Curzon, ‘unbelievable as it may appear, the effect was almost negligible!'

He called at No. 10 in respect of a living which had fallen vacant meanwhile at Kedleston, to discover if on the list of candidates for the Prime Minister’s Ecclesiastical Patronage there happened to be anyone suitable for the incumbency which he desired to fill. He explained in great detail the particular qualities required, and mentioned the material advantages to be enjoyed, the fuel and light, the vegetables and fruit, the occasional contact with himself, which led abruptly to the most important consideration of all, namely, ‘As, my dear fellow, he will periodically come into personal proximity with myself and my wife, it is, of course, essential that he should be a gentleman.’

So stately a figure surviving alone out of a vanished past could only exist in a rarefied atmosphere, like the scent of a long since faded flower.

Meanwhile Bonar’s Conference, now sitting in Paris, was becoming hopeless. Poincaré insisted on occupying the Ruhr in order to bring pressure upon Germany, while Bonar regarded the demands as impossible, and the occupation as catastrophic. Thus Great Britain was placed in the invidious position of having to recognise

proposals from her Allies with which she was not in sympathy, while finding herself approached with alternative proposals by the German Ambassador, Herr von Stamer, for transmission to the French

Bonar became more and more dejected. He was painfully struggling beneath these cumulative burdens which weighed more heavily every day. By March he was beginning to lose his voice and the Easter Recess brought no relief. On April 9th the House met again. The Prime Minister took his seat between Mr Baldwin and Mr Bridgeman on the Treasury Bench in time for his first question, No. 44. He spoke in his usual almost conversational way, then suddenly his voice subsided. 'Speak up!' cried someone from the Opposition Benches, and immediately the whole House turned upon the interrupter in marked resentment. Bonar stood still, his lips moved, but no sound came. Then he smiled wistfully, and actually articulated, 'I will do my best.' But he failed. Mr Baldwin, the Deputy Leader, took his place, and Bonar left the Chamber. The business of the House continued as usual.

During that same month, however, a welcome diversion presented itself in the marriage of H.R.H. The Duke of York, which temporarily dispersed the clouds. Notwithstanding his intimacy with Prince Albert, Ronald was at a loss to discover any form of wedding gift which could be offered both suitably and appropriately by himself. So acting on the principle that a faithful servant reflects his Master, he consulted an old friend named Osborn, the Duke's valet. On his advice they called in Mr Howlet, the King's valet, and the three held council together. The combination was fortunate. The Orders and decorations worn by the King were either period pieces, in the case of Stars, or peculiar to himself in respect of other insignia. That is to say, the former, like antique silver, proclaimed both the hall-mark of date and the perfect craftsmanship of its maker, while the latter were specially constructed just under regulation size for his personal use. The effect, therefore, when worn in combination with each other, produced an extremely pleasing proportion, and they were a source of considerable pride and admiration. Mr Howlet displayed them to demonstrate the artistic merit of the old against the modern. He handled the King's Garter Star lovingly, and com-

pared it with the Duke's The one was a nobleman, he said, and the other a farmer'

To obtain such a Star would of course be the ideal solution, but how was this possible? At the death of a Knight of the Garter, as in the case of other Orders of Chivalry, the jewel and sash are returned to the Sovereign and are not to be found either in collections or shops, with the exception, of course, of jewelled replicas constructed by the recipient

'Leave it to me,' said Mr Howlet

As a result Ronald was indebted to this masterpiece of staff work for the opportunity to offer his late master a Star of the Order of the Garter approximating in beauty to the Star worn by the King Its date was 1749, and newly engraved on the reverse in small characters

'Presented to H R H the Duke of York by his devoted friend and dutiful servant Ronald Waterhouse, sometime his Private Secretary 26th April 1923'

The note which accompanied it explained

'Of all those who wish you well at the present time, no one I think can hope more earnestly than I do, that with the exception of your birthday, you will always regard the date of your marriage as the most fortunate in your life It is for this reason that taking advantage of the high Order, the Emblem of which you so frequently wear, I have ventured to have that date placed upon it Should Your Royal Highness do me the honour of wearing this Star, there will exist between us a secret of romance, for while the insignia of your chivalry alone will meet the public eye, it will bear beneath its protection, and above your own heart, the birth date of a new happiness, the extent of which, I pray, may be far beyond your present knowledge'

To which the Duke returned a characteristically personal reply He would always wear it He liked the Inscription and the written idea Only a wonderful friend 'like you have been to me' would have thought of it

The strain upon Bonar remained constant, his condition showed no perceptible sign of improvement, and disturbing rumours were whispered about his health Medical opinion agreed, and insisted upon, a respite abroad Lord Curzon presided in his place at

Cabinet meetings, but it was not possible to shield him wholly from cares of State, and the trouble persisted without apparent amelioration Relaxation on the Riviera fell short of expectations

On the 6th of May the Prime Minister put to sea in a Dutch liner with his son Richard A short cruise in the Mediterranean, it was thought, would beneficially cut out official contact But neither his spirits nor his voice responded, and on the 10th they forsook St Nicholas, the Patron Saint of sailors (and of pawn-brokers, as Bonar subsequently remarked!) in favour of J C Davidson, whom they met at Aix-les-Bains He wrote at once to Ronald Bonar was a little better, a break in the weather might restore his voice, but the prospect of Max Beaverbrook's expected arrival provided the only immediate solace The position seemed so precarious that he enclosed a confidential letter to Mr Baldwin warning him of probabilities

On the 16th reports were in abeyance pending the verdict of Sir Thomas Horder, who was waiting to pronounce in Paris, but on that same day Davidson wrote very confidentially, 'My own opinion is that he is not likely to continue after Whitsun,' and on the 18th he telegraphed that Horder was having a further consultation but with little hope of a favourable result

All these bulletins were extremely confidential, and their information was deliberately suppressed so that no word of anxiety escaped Then the little party in Paris travelled home together without conveying any impression to the public or the Ministerial mind that the Prime Minister's condition was gradually getting worse, and that his rest abroad had done him no good at all

The only two Cabinet Ministers with any suspicion of the real facts were Mr Baldwin, who had been kept closely informed by Mr Davidson, and Lord Curzon, to whom Lord Crewe had written, from the Embassy in Paris, a somewhat alarming account of his own conversations with Bonar

CHAPTER 24

1923

IT WAS NOW SATURDAY, MAY 19TH, 1923. EVERY SENIOR CABINET Minister was out of London for the Whitsun Recess, with the exception of the lonely Prime Minister, who returned from Paris on that day. He was desperately ill, but the affairs of State seemed comparatively quiescent, and no one anticipated any new cause for anxiety. He wrote to Lord Curzon, as Leader of the House of Lords, announcing his intention of resigning at once, but without any mention of his successor beyond the phrase — 'If, as I hope, he (the King) accepts my resignation — he will have to take immediate steps about my successor.' He saw Mr Baldwin the next day, leaving him equally in the dark.

On Sunday the 20th, Ronald breakfasted alone with Bonar and remained with him until the arrival, at eleven o'clock, of his son-in-law, Major-General Sir Frederick Sykes. As he was unable to tender his own resignation in person, Bonar felt that his next-of-kin should deputise for him, but his two sons, Tony and Richard Law, being too young, he asked his daughter's husband — and Ronald's former chief — to perform this duty.

The King was at Aldershot, but Lord Stamfordham had been consulted by telephone, and in Bonar's car, Sykes and Ronald set out together on their sad mission. They relapsed into silence by natural inclination, and Ronald was soon pondering deeply upon the pros and cons of Bonar's successor. He found himself closely contesting the relative considerations arising out of a carefully prepared *aide-memoire* given to him the previous day by J C Davidson, setting out the case in favour of Mr Baldwin. The resignation of the Prime Minister rendered it necessary for the Crown to exercise its prerogative in the choice of a successor. There appeared to be only two possible alternatives.

The case in favour of Lord Curzon was obvious. His industry, his mental equipment, his learning were all of the highest order.

Yet, would the Premiership in the House of Lords be acceptable in this democratic age?

But Lord Curzon possessed tremendous knowledge and grasp of International Affairs

That fact, of course, presented a most difficult problem His exclusive learning in Foreign Affairs, coupled with the constant sense of collision between himself (when Foreign Secretary) and the Prime Minister, would almost certainly compel him to retain both offices if he succeeded to the premiership He had in fact stated that such would be his intention Would his health stand up to a strain which in these days was far in excess of the same burden a quarter of a century ago? Only last year his health had failed, and responsibilities of the Foreign Secretary had been temporarily assumed by Lord Balfour

Constitutionally there could be no impropriety — Why, little more than twenty years ago the late Lord Salisbury had experienced no inconvenience when leading the Government from the Upper House

Nevertheless it would be within political recollection that although foreign interests had in no way suffered thereby, the primary reason for Lord Salisbury's leadership with the additional responsibility of the Foreign Office, was to dispose of difficulties of divided control inherited at the time from much earlier Cabinet dissensions in the years between 1875 and 1878,¹ but that his so doing, had been severely censured by the Liberal Party, because it relegated discussion of Foreign Affairs to the Lords, and excluded the Commons

But the disadvantage of having a Prime Minister in the House of Lords had been anticipated and provided for by Lord Birkenhead's proposed reform of the Upper House, which would enable Lord Curzon to speak with equal facility in either House

It was inconceivable in any event that the immense patriotism of Lord Curzon and his loyal services to the Crown would be withheld

As an ex-Viceroy, and an experienced Cabinet Minister, there could be no one whose claim bore any comparison In both capacities, Lord Curzon's value was intimately known It was difficult to conceive any alternative head of the Government

There was also for consideration the fact that in the opinion of many Members of the House of Commons, Lord Curzon represented that section of privileged conservatism which unquestionably had its value, but which, in these changing days, should not be too assiduously exploited The time was

¹ Due to divergent view between Disraeli on the one hand and Lords Carnarvon and Derby on the other, as to whether His Majesty's Government should carry the policy of protecting Turkey against Russia to an Ultimatum

not propitious, in the opinion of many Parliamentarians, for the direction of domestic policy to be placed outside the House of Commons, and although Foreign and Imperial affairs were naturally of vital importance, the basic consideration seemed to turn upon stability at home

But Mr Bonar Law had written to Lord Curzon and had also recognised his claim to act as Deputy during his own illness and enforced absence abroad Did not that indicate an obvious alternative to himself?

Mr Bonar Law had certainly written to Lord Curzon, in his dual capacity of Deputy Leader and Leader of the House of Lords He was also intending to see Mr Baldwin to-day, but since the choice remained with the King he could not, even by implication, anticipate that choice in either instance Moreover, while it was certainly the case that Mr Bonar Law had left the Leadership of the Government, that was to say the Chairmanship of the Cabinet, in the care of Lord Curzon, he had also deliberately appointed Mr Baldwin to the Chancellorship of the Exchequer which, according to custom, carried with it both the second Ministerial position in the Government, and also the Leadership of the House of Commons

Then what was to be done? If Mr Bonar Law were not so sick a man, he could be approached even at his own home in Onslow Gardens

Alternatively, the Privy Council still remained, of which the Cabinet itself was merely a Sub-Committee

Should the question then be put to a meeting of the Privy Council?

It might be considered desirable to consult certain senior members

Who, for example?

Mr Balfour and Lord Salisbury — both ex-Presidents of Council, and the former an ex-Prime Minister

Well! And who else?

Lord Curzon and Mr Baldwin in their capacity exclusively as Leaders respectively of the House of Lords and of the House of Commons

Notwithstanding this hypothetical procedure, however, the claims of Lord Curzon loomed up with increasing weight upon the political horizon Mr Baldwin's promotion had been extremely rapid, he was lamentably inexperienced, and even his official life had been so short

While this could not be denied, Mr Baldwin represented, on the other hand, the same characteristics which had gained public confidence in Mr

Bonar Law—namely, simplicity, honesty, and balance, he had won the esteem of the City and of the commercial world, and since the introduction of his budget, knocking sixpence off the income tax, he was liked by all shades of political opinion

These considerations were scarcely comparable with the power and erudition of Lord Curzon

Nevertheless they reflected the feelings of a large body in Parliament. If Lord Curzon, as Prime Minister, were faced, for example, with the prospect of receiving delegations of the Miners' Federation, or the Triple Alliance, his temperament would perhaps be unimical to harmony, and might endanger future relations between the Government and Labour

This was merely a Party view

The number of Peers holding office, namely four out of five of the Secretaries of State, had already caused comment. And any additional subordination of the House of Commons, by placing the direction of Government Policy in the Upper House, might be strongly resented

Thus a situation arose wherein the first Minister of the Crown was tendering his resignation, without submitting an alternative name to his own, and without desiring to do so. A searching analysis of the case for Mr Baldwin had unfolded a story eminently favourable to Lord Curzon, and, in face of a dilemma the magnitude of which it was not possible to estimate, Ronald became seriously alarmed by his own misgivings. A very grave doubt crept into his mind as to how the faithful discharge of his duty could be reconciled with the uncertain conclusion of so closely reasoned a comparison. He found himself being driven fatefully to an immediate choice between unqualified service to the State, and the silence imposed by his word of honour given that morning to Bonar. The two were diametrically opposed, but the former prevailed, while thus mentally comparing these potentialities, he recalled textually the following dialogue which had taken place while he breakfasted alone with Bonar.

Ronald Constitutionally, the King may adopt either of two courses—firstly, he may refuse to recognise your resignation, and ask you to appoint a Deputy. What is the answer to that?

B L My unqualified resignation *must* be accepted. I can't go on, and I do not want to delegate my responsibilities. (Bonar knew that he was dying.)

Ronald Very well, in that case the King may defer acceptance

of your resignation pending a recommendation as to your successor What is the answer to that?

B L I do not want to be asked that

Ronald But you may find it inevitable

B L Then I shall refuse

Ronald You are placing me in an impossible position It is like asking a Press Reporter to publish certain half-facts without giving him the full context and telling him exactly what to suppress You send me to represent you on an extremely difficult and delicate mission, you completely reserve the substance, provide me only with the shadow, and then expect me to succeed You *must* tell me what your answer would be, if you had to give it

B L But I would not, and I will not

Ronald If I give you my word of honour to preserve your confidence?

B L In that case I am afraid I should have to say—
Baldwin

★

Lord Stamfordham was awaiting them at the Royal Pavilion, Aldershot, and immediately took General Sykes to the King He presented Bonar's submission and then withdrew It seems that some bewilderment prevails in Palace circles about the events which followed, but, while Lord Stamfordham took complete charge after Mr Bonar Law's resignation, the Press informed its readers the following day that Sykes and Ronald carrying 'the historic document' had motored from London to Aldershot 'His Majesty received them in audience and a long interview ensued'

Three-quarters of an hour later they left again for London, but it had been decided that Lord Stamfordham should follow at once, that Lord Salisbury and Mr Balfour, as ex-Presidents of the Council, should be recalled from the country, and that Lord Curzon and Mr Baldwin, as Leaders of the House of Lords and the House of Commons respectively, should be available for immediate consultation with Lord Stamfordham

All these arrangements were made without leakage or reasons given Even Lord Stamfordham's presence in London passed unobserved, and Lord Salisbury returned to Town during the night from a remote spot in the West of England on a telegram from

Ronald merely asking him to do so That telegram was sent by the G P O to a Coastguard Station, which must have been amazed to receive, direct from the Admiralty, instructions to deliver it at once by hand, several miles away

Ronald saw Lord Salisbury on his arrival long before breakfast the following morning, and was able to warn Mr Baldwin that he would be consulted on behalf of His Majesty by Lord Stamfordham, but in his capacity as Leader of the House of Commons, and not, at this stage, with a view to his succeeding the Prime Minister Lord Stamfordham himself communicated with Mr Balfour who immediately motored a hundred and forty miles to London from Sheringham, while suffering from phlebitis, and the only flaw in all these proceedings arose from the fact that Lord Curzon had a decided antipathy to telephones in any of his country houses He was at Montacute, and Lord Stamfordham telegraphed to him asking if he could see him in London on the following day Unfortunately, the purpose of this summons was not made clear, and Lord Curzon, jumping to only one conclusion, was photographed as the future Prime Minister when leaving his train in London If only the time of his arrival on the Tuesday had been known, such a terrible blow to his personal pride might have been avoided

The Press announced an imminent meeting of the Conservative Party at the Carlton Club, to elect a successor to Bonar as Leader of the party, but at a much later date¹ an article, obviously inspired, appeared in the *Evening Standard* This article related the actual conversation which had taken place between Bonar and Mr Baldwin on that same Sunday, the 20th of May It was headed 'How Mr Baldwin became Premier,' and it claimed to be 'a hitherto untold chapter of History'

The story concludes with these words 'It is said that they co-operated with Colonel Sir Ronald Waterhouse who was then Private Secretary to Mr Bonar Law He is not a Civil Servant, but the fact that he had been Equerry to the Duke of York enabled him to move with confidence in Royal Circles'

So the end was at hand On the 23rd Ronald warned Lord Stamfordham for the information of the King, on the 24th, he received this reply from the Royal Pavilion, Aldershot

¹ 12th February, 1924

'Needless to say the fateful information in your letter received last evening was a shock and grief to the King and Queen, and, may I add, to myself You know with what feelings of sincere regard and friendship Their Majesties are drawn to the Prime Minister, so this tragic termination of his career is a real sorrow to them If, alas! there is no hope of recovery, no one can wish for a prolonged and suffering end — I feel for you and all your colleagues '



On June 24th Ronald wrote

'As evidence that for the moment at least my old Chief is very much better, it may amuse you to hear that last week his sister reverted to her old attack about his disreputable car Whereupon Bonar rang the bell and sent for his chauffeur — the typical sort of faithful Scot like those at Balmoral —

"Sweeney," said he, "I should be glad if you will buy me a new car "

Exit Sweeney

Then turning to his sister he remarked, "Now that I'm no longer in the limelight it doesn't matter "

So Bonar emerges after all like a plutocrat in a magnificent conveyance, instead of a car covered with American cloth to hide its shabbiness, and tied up with tape to keep it together, which he apparently regarded as suitable for a Prime Minister

I'm afraid however this *volte face* is only a flash in the pan, and that his resuscitated spirits are only the reaction from a very exhausting treatment

Bonar lingered sadly for five more months until 30th October 1923, when we finally lost him Some time afterwards I read an affectionate and moving tribute to him by a political opponent, but an old friend of Ronald's, MacNeill Weir, Parliamentary Private Secretary to Mr Ramsay MacDonald in the first two Labour Administrations

'It may be too soon yet,' it concluded, 'to assess his achievement and to determine his place In days to come it may be possible for the historian, remote from the dust and clamour of party controversy, to judge the standing and precedence of Mr Bonar Law Then due regard will be given to his nobility of

character, his political sagacity, his native skill, his persuasive eloquence, and above all his simple-minded honesty' ¹

Greater testimony it would be difficult to give and folly to expect from the pen of one who knew Bonar, but disagreed with him, who adheres to the caution of the Scot, but yields to the affectionate temperament of the Celt

Mr Baldwin said 'For him I am thankful that he has been spared further suffering. For his friends the loss is irreparable. The Country will not forget that he sacrificed his life in her service.'

And here is Ronald's note

'I, who knew him on a plane rather removed from most others, know how much more could be said of a man without comparison by which to estimate his worth'

¹ *Evening Standard*, 30th October 1934 (the anniversary of Mr Bonar Law's death)

CHAPTER 25

1923

AND THEN MR BALDWIN

Mr Baldwin is self-effacing and modest, perhaps largely as the result of a Presbyterian training coupled with the shy precocity of an only child, and in some measure because of his pronounced democratic tendencies

The typically English Mr Baldwin is composed of a collection of contradictions His own estimate of himself at this period was summed up in three phrases repeated respectively from time to time during expansive moments at Chequers

'I was born a gentleman'

'I am a lazy man'

'I am not such a fool as people think'

The first (an unusual claim, since the late Mr Justice Avory said that 'a gentleman is one who never mentions the word') was probably a borrowed idea One of his two great inspirations, Oliver Cromwell (the other was Disraeli), had said 'I was by birth a gentleman, living neither in any considerable height nor yet in obscurity I have been called to several employments in the nation and, not to be overtedious, I did endeavour to discharge the duty of an honest man in those services'

Words strangely prophetic of Mr Baldwin Or again 'I would have been glad to have lived under my woodside, to have kept a flock of sheep, rather than undertaken such a Government as this'

Pomp and circumstance were of course irksome to him, as indeed they become, after the first novelty has faded away, to any man of his eminence and years But the glamour of academic robes, the embroidery and gold, had not yet tarnished on his Privy Councillor's dress when he abandoned its elegance for the more comfortable uniform — to a generous figure — of an Elder Brother of Trinity House While his everyday clothes were a constant source of worry to the *Tailor and Cutter*, he retained all the small boy's love of make-believe The pleasure which it obviously gave him to be photographed in the war bonnet of a Red Indian chief

is quite infectious, and he looked the very picture of a country squire when dressed in a pink hunt coat at the head of his table at Astley Hall in Worcestershire

One day Ronald wrote from Chequers 'Yesterday he had been given a rosette, the emblem worn by Stewards at the Varsity Sports. He was delighted with this, he played with it and produced it to all and sundry. To-day, after the sports, he said to me, "I found Birkenhead walking round with a rosette too. I wonder why they gave *him* one? I thought it rather took the gilt off"'.

At school he was a delicate boy, and failed on this account to attract attention at games, or in the field of sport, although a red-letter day dawned when he won his first colours at the age of fifteen, and so perhaps his greatest ambition later was to be elected to the M C C. When he became Prime Minister every effort, therefore, and indeed great pressure, was brought into action until this desire could be attained, and the wearing of the Club tie subsequently gave him infinite pleasure. I have seen him thus equipped when following the Cambridge eight on the Thames just before the Boat Race. Equally at the University Rugby football match on a bitterly cold day he scorned the protection of a muffler, and appeared instead in the unseasonable colours of the famous tie. These are matters of importance if it be true that you must know what a man *is* before you can justly deal with what he does.

His claim to laziness deserves recognition in view of his faithful adherence to Lord Cromer's dictum, 'The masterpieces of a Statesman's art are for the most part not acts, but abstinences from action.' In debate Mr Baldwin has the courage of a bull, but in ordinary London traffic his progress is lamentable. 'Better ten minutes on an island,' he insists, 'than a lifetime in the tomb,' and upon the island he remains in the middle of Whitehall until someone has petrified the traffic.

His council of perfection is Abraham Lincoln's — 'government of the people by the people for the people.' It recalls the Declaration of the Rights of Man '*Nous voulons faire une déclaration pour tous les hommes, pour tous les pays, et pour servir d'exemple au monde*' It is also suggestive of the result said to come from too many cooks.

As he motored back from Chequers on a frosty morning, his car

skidded badly Thenceforth he avoided the highroad and returned to London by rail

Mr Baldwin believed absolutely in the precept 'Safety first' In a half-decked river-boat for example, with J C Davidson and Ronald on a perfectly calm day, and with dry land not more than fifty feet away on each side, he clung to the combing so pathetically that they were obliged to put him ashore Nor, I believe, would any consideration tempt him off the ground to try conclusions in the air

All of which explains his claim to laziness, and his preference for waiting, but the self-styled laziness also accounts perhaps for his disconcerting reluctance to commit himself with finality, even to the extent of initialling a paper as evidence that he had seen it Yet his penmanship, when applied to private correspondence, invariably produces a masterpiece of composition

His sense of humour is sparkling, but his *bon mots*, though numerous, are for the most part odd, and contrast strangely with the whimsicality of Bonar Somebody once sent him a most ingenious toy from Paris in the shape of a musical box and paper container for attachment to the wall The removal of a sheet of paper produced an appropriate musical accompaniment and this kept him in exuberant spirits for days Is it not from such small beginnings that one observes the fundamental differences between great men? Bonar would have failed to appreciate this gift, but, then, Bonar had no ear for music

His third claim constituted a slight deception, and he knew it Nobody thought him a fool, but he coquettled with the contrast to reality It enhanced the mystery surrounding him, and mystery was a good cloak to achievement When playing for time, indeed, he assumed a *non possumus* expression, accompanied by an apparent inability to think clearly, or even to put thought into words This attitude was so successful that in a difficult situation it became a commonplace with members of his staff to play 'Idiot boy'

Nevertheless, Mr Baldwin's grey eyes twinkled with joy when recalling that he was a member of Bonar Law's Ministry in 1922, which Lord Birkenhead had classified as a collection of 'second class brains' Indeed, he appears to appropriate the stricture as exclusively peculiar to himself In this connection it is only just to remember that certain notable omissions existed in that Ministry,

Lord Birkenhead himself being by no means the least important, but it is equally relevant that on the 4th November, 1922, Bonar, wishing to challenge this indictment when speaking at Leeds, told Ronald to obtain the facts from No 10. The telegraphic reply reads

'Amery double first fellow All Souls Barlow first law and Senior Whewell scholar Boscowen first classics President Oxford Union Bridgeman scholar Trinity Cambridge Cave Double First scholar and Hon Fellow St John's Oxford Curzon Fellow All Souls President Oxford Union Hoare double first classics President Oxford Union Sanders First Law Wood Fellow All Souls Monsell, navy Stanley, Woolwich Tryon, Sandhurst Wilson, Marines Others no academic distinctions in reference books (Signed) Fry'

This story is frequently on Mr Baldwin's lips. He naïvely enjoys it almost as much as he relishes Lord Curzon's description of him as 'a man of the utmost insignificance,' thereby supporting the suspicion that expediency is apparently the only arbiter between politics and grace.

The very fact that Mr Baldwin proclaimed his title to those three particular traits, namely, being a gentleman, a lazy man, and a man of simplicity, seems to provide evidence that he might have included a fourth claim without fear of inaccuracy. He could have called himself a 'modest man.' But he never paraded those characteristics which were indubitably his by right, so he *never* alluded to himself as a 'modest man.' Nor did he mention his superlative gift as a tactician, or his extraordinary talent for rhetorical word-painting, which indeed eclipsed everything else about him. No! he loved to be mysterious because it gave him time, and because, according to himself, he was a lazy man.

If it be true that the words 'nobleman and gentleman originally conveyed the same meaning,' then it would seem that, if Lord Chesterfield's penetrating eighteenth-century gaze could have been accommodated to the glare of modern conditions, he would have regarded the combination of the two as a worldly degree of 'eminence rather than as an inherent standard of worth. But since Mr Baldwin stressed his quality, it must be assumed that, in politics, nothing goes without saying.'

In spite of the great orators of the past, the difference in style

during their several periods, and the variety of subject and occasion, it may justly be held that for sheer concise and brilliant word-painting Mr Baldwin is without equal. He found himself possessed of this amazing gift. He developed it assiduously, until finally his self-training fashioned the talent into a highly skilled accomplishment. It was said in 1924 that even his voice was so greatly in advance of the times, that when broadcasting was first introduced to the political arena, it materially influenced the General Election preceding his second administration.

In the earlier days of his Ministry he rarely made a speech which had not been written for him. On a really important occasion, not necessarily political, two, or even three versions might be prepared. He would digest them all and then deliver an entirely different rendering of his own, but, in order to produce the last, the apparently superfluous preliminary seemed to be essential. Nowadays, presumably, such donkey work has become unnecessary. An immense amount of analytical research is probably boiled down to the bone, and then, as he himself has expressed it, he would 'conceive and be delivered of a powerful oration.' This might be a professorial address dedicated to any subject, expanded to any length, and pitched upon the highest peak accessible to a scientific audience. Or, it might be the lightest after-dinner scintillation comparable in his own mind to a Turner painting.

So Mr Baldwin discovered that his unique rhetorical gift was capable of stifling criticism, and that, behind this appeal to emotion, the mystery of him could slumber undisturbed. He therefore developed the advantage, focused popular opinion upon his strong suit, and kept the world guessing about the rest. When in doubt, playing for time, or unwilling to commit himself, he eventually adopted the formula, 'you know you can trust me.' This, in default of a more concrete assurance, came to be accepted as a sufficient talisman, and, notwithstanding his frequent change of stance, the magic carpet never wore bare or even looked shabby excepting under very close observation.

There were a few whose scrutiny penetrated his protective screen at the outset, and some who were bewildered and reluctant to follow, but the majority were obediently blind and faithful as the tides are to the moon.

Coupled with this unparalleled gift was the supreme talent of

the actor Not in the sense which applies to most practised platform speakers, but to the infinitely greater degree which suggests a dual personality When the issue grips him sufficiently it would seem almost as though he is levitated from the Stanley Baldwin of everyday life and, to use ordinary psychic jargon, is controlled by some monumental spirit of the past, Disraeli, for example, or Cromwell But, in fact, this is not what happens at all in my belief By no trick of reasoning could Mr Baldwin be accused of precipitating himself on to any astral plane He is of the Earth, the beer and beef, the Yeoman of Old England, but then he is also a dreamer, and therein lies the secret

He dreams for hours on end, while playing patience on a portable green baize board In those dreams his selected idol not only holds the centre of the stage but controls everything within sight and sound In this dream, so vivid is his apprehension, so perfect the forensic art displayed that opposition is confounded and infidels are swept aside Then Mr Baldwin emerges out of his trance like a giant, he puts away his cards, and is fortified against prodigious odds He confides his secret to no one because, as Mrs Baldwin says, he is the merest boy and, therefore, very shy, but out he comes into the open to play the leading part himself, to emulate the hero of his dream, with the absolute conviction of success, not of his thesis but of his personal rendering of it Thus the seer, the orator and the actor combining, the result is at times overwhelming, but so little does he share the greatness which he frequently represents, that he can move his audience into a state of extreme emotion or wild enthusiasm, without being stirred himself by even one quickened pulse-beat

This explains his extraordinarily varied vocabulary, and the absence of mannerisms in his elocution, both quite foreign to his everyday self It also accounts for the singular fact that if by some remote chance he ever rehearses a speech, his private audience is astonished to discover after listening to the public pronouncement that there was no resemblance between the two

But more than this It perhaps explains a certain direct conflict between Mr Baldwin, the exponent of greatness, and Mr Baldwin, the plain man in the street, for when thrown upon his own resources in regard to some decision which yields to no precedent upon his astral plane, nor manifests a spirit of power into which

he can project his mind, then even his imagination is unable to conjure up greatness equal to the occasion, and he at once succumbs to his own dictum, 'When in doubt, do nothing'

There was yet another factor at this early stage which may have contributed towards his distaste for precipitate action and his growing aversion for ambiguity

When Mr Baldwin had given £120,000 to the State in the hope, as he wrote anonymously to *The Times*, that others would follow his example (24th June, 1919), this magnanimous lead inspired no following in his fellow-citizens. And because he signed himself F S T, being at that time Financial Secretary to the Treasury, and caused his letter to be typed by an unmuzzled typist, his anonymity was betrayed and, in many quarters, his motive misunderstood.

It seems obvious that the world is becoming too materialistic to accept any idealism as an absolute standard. Until human knowledge reaches the point when the brain can make a balanced judgment, individual courage will be the victim of outside criticism, and may even succumb to it.

That Mr Baldwin was beginning to recognise this disturbing affliction of the body politic seems probable, for at a much later date, indeed many years later, he offered the following advice when broadcasting to thousands of children on 6th March, 1934

'Use your common sense, avoid logic, and grow a hide like a rhinoceros,'

and he went on to dispel any illusion of unrewarded service to the community by adding that

'the governing of our fellow human beings is the endless adventure'

With so lofty an ideal, Mr Baldwin shrank with horror from being driven to dissimulation. Sometimes when pressure became too strong, he would dodge back into obscurity. And then his conscience would be stricken. Sometimes a stoic immobility supplied his refuge, and, even at the risk of appearing indifferent, he would maintain a stubborn silence. But when he did react, he was genuine and relentless, neither qualifying nor approaching ambiguity.

About this time a plan materialised which had been pondered

and rehearsed by Ronald and his friend Sir Godfrey Thomas, Private Secretary to the Prince of Wales. There were few men of his father's generation to whom the Prince could turn with intimacy, but Mr Baldwin had a wonderful way with younger men and, given an easy personal equation, to whom could the Prince turn better than to the Prime Minister if only an unofficial contact were made between them? As a result there came a day when at the instance of the Prince it was arranged that Mr Baldwin should visit him at York House, not upon any particular matter, but unconventionally and as man to man. The distance is about four hundred yards, but half an hour before the appointed time the Prime Minister set off at a brisk pace with Ronald. They walked the whole length of St James's Park, back again, over the bridge, and round the lake, Mr Baldwin in considerable agitation, for this was a new ordeal and an excursion into the unknown.

'What shall I talk to him about?'

'Nothing,' was the reply, 'he will get you going fast enough on anything that interests him. An atmosphere of easy personal approach to you as Prime Minister may be of infinite value to him. That is all you need establish.' And Mr Baldwin sucked anxiously at his pipe.

Sir Godfrey Thomas said afterwards that H R H had been quite delighted with that first interview. So had Mr Baldwin, and the mutual regard thus begun never waned. It was the opening of an intimate friendship of inestimable value not only to the Prince, but to the Prime Minister, and presumably to the Country. Nearly fourteen years later, immediately following the Abdication of King Edward VIII, Mr Baldwin wrote to Ronald. 'Do you remember, long years ago, when you were so insistent that I should get to know the Prince of Wales? It was indeed a fortunate thing that I took your advice, as events turned out.'

CHAPTER 26

1923-1924

IN A SMALL ANTEROOM OVER THE PORCH AT CHEQUERS ARE STAINED-glass panels blazoning the following message

'This House of Peace and Ancient Memories was given to England as a thank-offering for her deliverance in the Great War 1914-1918, and as a place of rest and recreation for her Prime Ministers for ever'

The gift to the nation was made in January 1921, and the first Prime Minister to enjoy it as his official country home was Mr Lloyd George Bonar Law was accordingly the second incumbent by right, but his simple nature rebelled against amenities surplus to his own modest requirement, although he never failed to provide for the taste of others. It was perhaps due to the latter reason rather than the first that he waived his claim to the use of Chequers and thereby passed it to Mr Baldwin, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, in accordance with provision made in the Trust.

The Chequers Trust contains a categorical List of Ministers and officials in order of priority who shall become entitled to the use of Chequers in default of the Prime Minister, and the conditions are framed so that any occupier may not only regard it as his official country residence but may also live there 'even though his income should be limited to his salary.'

I have heard and seen it stated that the incidental cost of Chequers makes an additional charge upon the Prime Minister's personal expenditure, but this is a travesty of the fact, for the cost to the Prime Minister is nothing at all. He, or any other incumbent, is allowed £15 whenever he is there for the week-end. For mutual convenience, however, this sum is always included in the monthly allowance paid to the Curator by the Solicitor to the Trust. The entire staff is maintained on a basis of board wages and the monthly cheque is thus pooled by the Curator for all purposes. In practice there has invariably been a credit balance averaging about £100 at the end of the Financial Year and, on

advice to this effect from the Trust, the Curator (again according to practice) places half at the local Bank account for continuity and hands a cheque for the other half to the Prime Minister. Thus the use of Chequers actually provides a gratuity of about £50 per annum!

Furthermore, the expressly stated intention of the Trust Deed had been administered with considerable leniency, for members of Mr Ramsay MacDonald's family resided there for weeks when he personally was not there at all, and Mr Baldwin's son-in-law, Captain Munro, was in residence there with his wife during a lengthy convalescence. In both cases these visits were entirely at the expense of the Trust without any contribution whatever from the Prime Minister.

The history of the Chequers estate, extending to about 1,000 acres, is dramatic, but although it figures in Domesday Book the name derives from nearly a hundred years later, when its owner (1173) and his descendants, being clerks of the Exchequer, became known as 'de Scaccario,' an appellation transposed later into the Norman French 'de Checkers.' From these it passed by marriage into the Hawtrey family and so remained until 1597. Thence through several generations in the female line until 1712, when its owner married Joanna, the granddaughter-in-law of Oliver Cromwell. Thus the estate remained by inheritance in the same line from 1173 to 1912. It was then occupied and subsequently purchased by Lord Lee of Fareham, who presented it to the Nation in 1921, nearly 850 years after its christening.

The house, reconstructed in 1565, stands in a sheltered basin surrounded by rising ground from two points of which, 'Beacon' and 'Combe' Hills, the view extends as far as the Berkshire Downs, the Cotswolds and sometimes even the Welsh mountains. During this same year, of rebuilding, William Hawtrey was charged by Queen Elizabeth with the safe custody at Chequers of Lady Mary (sister of Lady Jane) Grey, and on the plaster wall of a small room at the top of the house, where she was incarcerated for two years, are the remains of a lament which she traced there. These remains are now preserved under glass.

In such surroundings Mr Baldwin recaptured the joy of life. Guests were comparatively rarely invited during his tenure, for he preferred to throw off the cares of State and enjoy to the full this

country mansion atmosphere, surrounded only by members of his own family. The contents and furnishing of Chequers represent the accumulation of many years. In the words of Lord Lee, 'Many of the objects described in the catalogue are not of the finest quality from a collector's point of view . . . but they reflect 'the tastes and collecting enthusiasms of generations of past possessors and constitute a picture of what an old English house may contain which has been owned and cherished for many hundreds of years by people of taste and moderate means.' Be that as it may, Mr Baldwin was a superlative guide and, as a great devotee of Oliver Cromwell, he would cherish and produce the original life-mask made about 1655, the slippers, the sword used by him at Marston Moor, and the Bible which belonged to Mrs Cromwell. These are all kept in the long gallery which runs almost the full length of the house on the north side, and which was formerly used as a kind of gymnasium in the winter. It was in this gallery that the first Labour Prime Minister, Mr Ramsay MacDonald, held conference with the French Radical-Socialist Prime Minister, M Herriot. It was here that seven years earlier, during the Great War, the British and French Prime Ministers had agreed upon 'Unity of Command' on the Western Front (1917), and here Mr Baldwin would always play patience in the evening, for he loved the atmosphere of this Long Gallery.

The amenities of Chequers were such that engagements necessitating Mr Baldwin's presence elsewhere after the House rose on Fridays, were systematically diverted. For some reason he always expected Ronald to be there with him, and although these weekend visits were health-giving, restful, luxurious, and of course extremely interesting, in the long run, they nevertheless involved a great personal strain, as the last hope of a few hours to himself vanished from month to month with each succeeding week. It was the more inexplicable since any other member of the staff would have done equally well, and particularly so because the reputedly gloomy face affected by Ronald never harmonized with the buoyancy of Mr Baldwin, nor, presumably, did he like Ronald to champion, as he occasionally did, the prestige of the Prime Minister's office, to the disadvantage of any personal popularity accruing to its trustee.

Mr Baldwin disliked long words, pleading as he constantly did,

'I am a simple man, and my mind works slowly I hope you will talk to me in words of one syllable' — because in his own words he hated tetralogy in any form

But an artist must be forgiven his idiosyncrasies, even though they be sometimes very bewildering Mr Baldwin, for example, seemed to prefer a heavy blast to a tempered touch If one burst into his reverie after rattling and slamming the door, it went well, but if, out of deference to the peaceful vibrations in his room, one approached with care, his reaction implied a sudden awakening to the presence of something stealthy Ronald never succeeded in approximating this conception to his own, and his gloomy countenance was therefore disconcerting even to himself

Mr Baldwin was also an indefatigable pedestrian, while Ronald abominates walking merely for the sake of exercise This distress however was greatly mitigated by such company, for on those long tramps into the country, Mr Baldwin used him like the parody of a post-box into which he poured his multifarious thoughts

On Sundays, shortly after breakfast, they would go out over fields, hills, downs and dales at a pace exceeding four miles an hour for three hours without halt or respite Admittedly this may have been good for them, but Ronald was never grudging in his welcome to the Prime Minister's son-in-law, Captain Gordon Munro, who occasionally found time to join the Chequers party Like Ronald, he was a time-expired soldier, and an ex-Cavalry-man to boot, who heartily endorsed the view that a horse was made to underpin a man Mr Baldwin liked to bully them a little, I think, but the great collaboration and *esprit de corps* which existed between them survived, and when the three started off on these perambulations, the Prime Minister never reached home without one or other of his escort staggering with grim determination at his elbow

But in the recollection of Ronald it was the Great Hall which formed the setting for certain memorable happenings Although the most modern apartment in the house, for it was an open court-yard until 1870, that Great Hall pleased me also, because of the portrait, a portrait of Doctor Andrew Wood by Raeburn, which hangs on the right of the fireplace Apart from its intrinsic merit or value to a collector's eye, that picture is more satisfying to me than any other in the house

The fireplace is surmounted by a trisectioned mantel bearing the arms of the three principal owners—de Checkers, Hawtrey, and Lee, and beneath any one of these a man might fall into the enormous grate with nothing to arrest his plunge. There are long iron weapons with which to adjust huge burning logs, they stand about singly on the hearth, or in groups, and on a well-remembered occasion Mrs Baldwin seized one of them the better to illustrate her points when delivering a homily to her guest, Lord Desborough, on some particular form of attack in fencing. She manoeuvred so that the high mulioned window came behind her, and the light shone searchingly into her opponent's face. Then with bended knees, flashing eyes, and outstretched arm, she crouched low, brandishing her poker so close to Lord Desborough's diaphragm that Ronald became concerned for his safety, and he, fortunately, convinced by her argument. But Lord Desborough had won the *épée* Championship at the Military Tournament, he had represented England in the first International Tournament in France, in the Olympic Games at Athens, and Mrs Baldwin had also been a fencing enthusiast in her earlier days, so the point at issue was being contested by worthy exponents of the art, and Ronald's kindly apprehensions were superfluous.

Mrs Baldwin has equally preserved a lasting reputation as founder and very active member of the White Heather Cricket Club at Rottingdean, the distinguished pioneer of ladies' cricket clubs, and it is probably this fortunate fact which did much to inspire in her husband the love of sport, which materialised late in life. For it is probable that in addition to the many other successful achievements which he unreservedly attributes to his wife's influence, he owes it to her also that a pupilage accorded to few non-participants enabled him to attain eminence as a patron of football, cricket and rowing.

At a later date in 1925 Mr Baldwin discarded the cares of State for a brief span in the interest of sport, and invited the Old Berkeley Hounds to meet at Chequers. It proved a notable occasion and a worthy revival, for hounds had not met at this traditional domain, now the Prime Minister's residence, for some two hundred years.

On Saturday, January 24th, of that year the late Mr E T Tyrwhitt-Drake rode into the famous forecourt with his equally

famous pack and assisted at a real time-honoured hunt breakfast The hunt servants quaffed a stirrup cup, horses were made much of, hounds were fondled by all and sundry, and then moved off to draw the home coverts followed by a field three hundred strong, gaily besprinkled with their own gamboge coats, and the scarlet of neighbouring packs

The woods were thick and the scent was poor, so the far greater number of followers on foot, headed by Mr Baldwin himself with leggings and a shooting-stick, had a good show on a brilliantly fine day But there were several sharp bursts — one of thirty minutes — at the beginning of which Ronald took a voluntary toss

He was out by the special request of Mr Baldwin, in order to ride a beautiful little black mare of Mrs Davidson's which had got out of hand, and was said to be unsafe He had frequently ridden her to hounds before in the Petworth country, for she came to his cousin Vernon Musgrave from the Life Guards, where after being perfectly schooled, she was found too small She finally passed from his stable to J C C Davidson's as a park hack for his wife

With Ronald she took charge, so he let her go, but, accommodating his own balance and movements to hers, she became interested, and when he kept her straight, at a gap and ditch, she tried to run out but failed, so they both came down After that he spoke kindly to her, she recognised an old friend, and there was no further difference of purpose or divergence of principle which could impair co-operation So the outing was a complete success, and incidentally, Mr Baldwin had marked a red-letter day at Chequers

One of the first problems confronting him on his accession involved the choice of a Chancellor of the Exchequer to fill the office vacated by himself, and his mind turned at once towards two ex-Chancellors The first, Sir Robert Horne, was unable to accept the offer for personal reasons, and the second, Mr Reginald McKenna, was unfortunately no longer a Member of Parliament, so his appointment would necessitate the provision of a safe seat

In this connection the devoted services to the Party of Sir Frederick Banbury had long since marked him out for elevation to the Peerage, and he was accordingly approached by the Whips But, being a staunch House of Commons man of the old school, he proved obdurate and only relinquished his seat (for the City

of London) at a later date under considerable pressure from outside and evidently great heart-searchings within Mr Baldwin had left the matter to be handled by proxy in his absence, and the following extract from Ronald's account indicates the nature of the struggle which encompassed this fine old veteran

'The Banbury incident is now concluded. He called this morning, and fearing a delicate and painful interview, I enlisted the support of Bobby Monsell (The Chief Whip, now Viscount Monsell)

'The venerable gentleman was evidently drawn between the fleshpots of the one House, and the bugle call of the other. The old war-horse snorted while the gourmet hungered, till at last chivalry prevailed and the distinguished Baronet left us as though proceeding to his own funeral.

'We were all three a little emotional, but he wrung our hand of sympathy while the words of congratulation which we ventured to whisper were lost amid tears of regret. Sic transit Sir Frederick Banbury, whose name will now appear in submission for the New Year's (Honours) List.'

Meanwhile the seat thus vacated was not required in this particular case after all, for Mr Baldwin, unable to defer the appointment indefinitely, transferred Mr Neville Chamberlain from the Ministry of Health to the Treasury, but the fact that such determined consideration had been given to Mr McKenna's name assumed an unexpected importance at a crucial moment later in the year.

Certain other ministerial appointments were also occasioned by the re-shuffle, amongst them that of J C C Davidson to the Duchy of Lancaster. This was his first elevation to ministerial rank and brought him exceptionally rapid promotion, since his return unopposed for the Hemel Hempstead Division in November 1920 marked his earliest appearance in Parliament. Davidson was sworn a Member of the Privy Council four years later when he became Chairman of the Conservative Party.

His extreme aversion to studio photographs coupled with a retiring nature explain in some measure why in 1923 the Country in general knew next to nothing about the Prime Minister. In order to amend this and to focus popular regard, Mr Wickham Steed published a monograph and the Unionist Central Office a

brochure They contained all the material then procurable but, even so, they were merely sketches and contrast astoundingly with the subsequent public appreciation of a Leader who at that time could walk about the streets of Westminster unnoticed and unrecognised Thus it happened that during the Summer Recess, when Ronald had joined his friends the Davidsons on the Norfolk Broads for the second time, Mr Baldwin also paid a visit to the Norfolk vicarage which they had rented, and slept in a neighbouring farmhouse with Ronald, but so little known was he that his presence occasioned neither interest nor comment and apparently passed completely unobserved

During breakfast on 14th August Ronald received the following telegram 'My sister coming to stay with us next Saturday till Monday writes she would particularly like to see you we would be delighted if you could come for week end at Castle Brownsea Island Poole Harbour Dorset motor could meet you Bournemouth Central Infanta Beatrice of Spain'

The sister was Queen Marie of Rumania So Ronald returned to town and left for Bournemouth with his old friend Slatin of Khartoum who had also been invited, 'so that everyone should be intimate with everyone,' and thus round off a party which numbered six there were the three sisters, H M Queen of Rumania, H R H Grand Duchess Kerile of Russia (whose son, the Grand Duke Vladimir, b 1917, is now claimant to the throne of Imperial Russia), H R H Infanta Beatrice of Spain, and the three men, H R H the Infante Alfonso of Spain, Major-General Baron Sir Rudolph von Slatin Pasha and Ronald

It seems coincidental that Ronald should have been spending a week-end with these three sisters together whom he had played with in his childhood and known as the three daughters of the Duke of Edinburgh In his mother's album there are several photographs of them autographed 'Sandra,' 'Victoria,' and 'Marie,' dated 1884 and 1885

Mrs Van Raalte, the owner, made a practice of lending Brownsea Island to Princess Beatrice and Prince Alfonso No one could approach them except by water to the private landing stage, and they were thus as undisturbed as Robinson Crusoe on his island, with the result that this party was most informal and intimate When Slatin and Ronald arrived they were received by Prince

Ali attired only in a pair of khaki shorts and gym shoes The Queen of Rumania in a turkish towel bathrobe and, according to Ronald, a 'sponge bag' on her head These costumes remained *de rigueur* during the whole visit and the only concession to decorum made for dinner by Prince Ali was the addition of a polo-collared white sweater

In these circumstances conversation became easy and amusing It swung from the intensely dramatic and harrowing when concerned with the Russian Revolution to the extremes of wit and daring in the matter of personalities, European statecraft, and historical events The Grand Duchess Kerile, who escaped with her family to the Polish frontier at the outbreak of the Revolution, remained a prisoner there for months expecting each day that they would be massacred During the whole of this time she played the part of a charwoman, scrubbing floors and hewing wood daily At Brownsea Island her arms were discoloured up to the shoulders and permanently 'burned' by frostbite She spoke of these experiences and other horrors in great detail, but with an uncanny lack of either reserve or embellishment Her whole nature was apparently still benumbed so that when someone changed the tempo, she automatically shared the humour Very many stories were recounted with much banter and lack of restraint Prince Ali would switch on Slatin and get him going not only about himself and his astounding survival after being a slave and prisoner of the Mahdi for twelve years in Omdurman, but about Lord Kitchener to whom, according to Slatin, Queen Victoria had said, when desiring that he should write direct to her about the progress of his Sudan campaign, 'Well, it won't be the first time you've written to an old lady, will it?' which so knocked poor Lord Kitchener off his balance that she had to administer a corrective

Queen Marie was, as always, charming and interesting 'You call me a cinema actress,' she asserted 'Indeed, Ma'am, I did nothing of the sort,' interrupted Ronald 'Very well, then, you thought it, or you should have done' And she proceeded to give a reasoned dissertation upon the necessity of what she termed her 'theatrical performances' And yet beneath the scintillating surface a penetrating discernment enabled her to detect the exact strength, direction and probable effect of every undercurrent in the tide of international affairs

Lord Curzon's attitude at Lausanne a few weeks previously was prompted, she thought, by two causes the long vision of the Prime Minister (Bonar Law) and the myopia of the Turk. The latter was bewildered by the French through Franklin-Bouillon and baffled by the British through Lord Curzon. The Turk had signed the French agreement but subsequently, in Paris, had failed to realise the promised financial coefficient. He had hoped to retain Mosul as a base of resistance against British reinforcement at Constantinople. The Turk had not seen further than his nose in either case because, said the Queen, France could pay nothing without jeopardising her capacity to negotiate the Reparations problem, and Great Britain could not contemplate reinforcement at Constantinople without mobilisation, which English public opinion would not tolerate! The Franco-Italian strategic position had been bluff, the Franco-British trump card at Lausanne had also been bluff! The Turk had called the first, it remained to be seen if he would call the second!

With regard to Reparations, she believed the personal equation, as represented by Lord Curzon, the Comte de Saint-Aulaire, and the Baron Moncheur, was scarcely conducive to solidarity of view as between Great Britain, France and Belgium, because they would individually be more concerned to bargain than to reconcile, for example, the fact that since 1919 the deficiencies of the French Budget approximated to 2½ thousand million sterling, with the fact that the maximum expectation from Germany over a period of years could not be more than half that amount. If the Comte de Saint-Aulaire were to accept Lord Curzon's estimates it would inevitably be tantamount to declaring his own country bankrupt! Everything depended upon a united front, and the sooner an opportunity could be created for announcing to the world some formula expressive of the fraternal feelings between France and England, the better.

Upon this question of Franco-British alliance the Queen became historically reminiscent. It was an absurd fallacy, she declared, to attribute this sentiment to custom, or to the personal influence of Edward VII, as was apparently the ill-informed British belief—it was nothing of the kind! Ever since the Wars of the Roses, when the Dukes of Burgundy had equipped hostile expeditions based upon the Dutch or Belgian coast, British security had rested upon

the independence of both those countries At that time the defensive was against Germany and France

Then came Spain, the greatest fighting force of the fifteenth century, and the Spanish occupation of the Netherlands France therefore ceased to be an enemy of England and was welcomed as an ally, for, apart from the Channel ports, the Meuse, the Scheldt and the Rhine offered at their tributaries all the advantages to a potential enemy, not only of shelter, but of a vast naval base

After the subjugation of Spain, France again threatened conquest of the Low Countries, so England allied herself with the Dutch against the French, and settled the matter in the days of Marlborough

Napoleon's aspirations towards the Netherlands and Antwerp produced the Triple Alliance — whereby England was supported both by Holland and the Prussian states — but they collapsed at the Battle of Waterloo The terms of Peace stipulated absolute recovery, and immunity from further aggression, of the Low Countries

Nearly a century later Prussia, now the leader of Germany, assumed the dominant position in Europe The independence of Belgium was again menaced, England became aware of the fact at the eleventh hour, and allied herself to France

Her Majesty reasoned at great length along these lines, quoting dates, Treaties, and the Covenants which they embodied, with an astonishing display of detailed historical data covering the period from the fifteenth century to modern times and showed that at no time had it ever been British policy to be coerced into attractive friendships on the Continent, but rather to persist, at all cost, and with a view to safety alone, in maintaining the continued independence of the Netherlands Although this necessity had survived to the present day, it had been amplified during the past fifty years by an equally cogent danger the importance of which apparently failed to penetrate popular understanding, no less than the real cause of the modern Anglo-French consortium

She then referred to the Bismarckian dream of German expansion towards the East by way of the Danube territories, linking Berlin with Baghdad, the North Sea with the Indian Ocean, and finally establishing an all-German route to the East The German objective was not France, as the latter blindly supposed, nor was

Belgium the only keystone to the British Imperial arch. It was the conquest of the East which meant, first, the consolidation of Austria with her concomitant States and, secondly, the absorption of Rumania and Serbia with the resultant reorientation of Turkey.

Had not the Anglo-French Alliance been cemented in the agreement of 1904, by which each country committed itself to respect the expansion of the other in Egypt and Morocco respectively, thereby securing the Mediterranean thoroughfare as common to both?

Had not the Kaiser, in 1898, ridden into Palestine on a white charger, heralding himself as 'the friend of Mahomet'? Had he not landed at Tangier for a similar display in 1905?

That purpose, argued the Queen, was fundamentally behind the Great War and still remained rooted in German mentality. *Au bout du compte*, therefore, Rumania and Serbia were in exactly the same position, vis-a-vis British security, as Belgium and Holland, while to France the balance of power in Europe was of paramount importance. Ergo, Anglo-French Alliance should be framed to cover both these co-equal contingencies, namely, *on ne passe pas* either by the Netherland or via the Balkan route!

And so this week-end passed, and Queen Marie journeyed up to Maidenhead, to lay a wreath upon the grave of Colonel Joe Boyle,¹ returning thence to Paris. From there she sent Ronald a Memorandum on the Greek situation setting out the Venizelist and the constitutional interests of Greece, upon all of which she had also been dilating in relation to the rumoured recognition by France and Great Britain of King George of Greece.

Her covering letter ends with these words, 'I send it on, as it was given to me, for you to ponder with those more competent than I - Marie.'

All of which inspires the reflection that had she been Queen of a country other than her own and exercised perhaps more immediate influence upon European affairs preceding the Great War, then, international history might now be developing differently.

¹ The grave at Hampton Hill, Middlesex, of Colonel Joe Boyle, a Canadian, whose services to Rumania were recognised by the whole Rumanian Royal Family, and especially by Queen Marie.

CHAPTER 27

1923-1924

ABOUT SIX WEEKS LATER RONALD LEFT FOR PARIS WITH SIR WILLIAM Tyrrell to meet the Prime Minister and Mrs Baldwin on their return from Aix-les-Bains with Mr and Mrs Davidson

The action of France in the Ruhr together with the complicated question of Reparations had produced an atmosphere of strained anxiety. The possibility of a clash at any moment between the French and German forces, the maintenance of British neutrality, and in fact the actual difficulty of preserving the Entente in the face of such divergent interests in so many directions, kept the official mind on tenterhooks. Diplomatic interchange of views had reached so tender a stage that it was thought possible to divert the risk of an impasse, and to appease the growing anxiety on both sides of the channel, by an early meeting between the Prime Minister of England, Mr Baldwin, and the President of the French Council, M Poincaré.

This was accordingly arranged and three years later in *Portraits and Portents*, Mr A G Gardiner commented upon it as follows: 'Lord Curzon, his Foreign Minister, had just issued a flaming arraignment of M Poincaré's policy in the Ruhr, and Mr Baldwin had duly endorsed it. Then he went to the Continent, paid a formal call on M Poincaré, and issued a communiqué in which he expressed the fullest agreement with the French policy. Nobody knows to this day the true facts about the extraordinary incident.'

Here are the true facts

On the 19th September a luncheon party of eight persons took place *en famille* at the British Embassy in Paris. M Poincaré, beside whom Ronald sat, was frigid and laconic because that was his way. Mr Baldwin was complacent and silent for a like reason. Lord Crewe, our Ambassador, rose valiantly to the occasion until even he grew apprehensive of idly flapping canvas in the dol-drums. Sir William Tyrrell, the only member whose whistling might have inspired the semblance of a breeze, was unfortunately confined to bed in the Hotel Crillon. At this point, with true

diplomatic intuition, Lord Crewe told Ronald in English to ask Poincaré how he liked British bees. The tension relaxed perceptibly, the situation was saved, Poincaré seized the opening and dispelled all further embarrassment. It appears that he had been to England, that a swarm of bees had welcomed him, and that he cherished a most unfavourable memory of the virus peculiar to British bees.

M. Poincaré was encouraged to pronounce the two words 'Engleesh bees' passably well, and then Lord Crewe moved to adjourn. Following this satisfactory preamble, Mr Baldwin and M. Poincaré were closeted together for nearly two hours. At the end of that time M. Poincaré emerged looking greatly refreshed, while Mr Baldwin appeared unchanged.

Two years later Mr Baldwin addressed his staff in humorous vein (again from Aix-les-Bains), asking that Ronald might join him at the Ritz in Paris, and concluded '*Mr Baldwin is very nervous with foreigners and does not understand their language, their manners, or their names*'.

The Prime Minister and Lord Crewe then drove to Rambouillet to visit the President of the Republic, during which interval a communiqué was drafted at the Hotel Crillon by two members of Mr Baldwin's staff, and, following approval by all parties, this was immediately issued. It left no room whatever for uncertainty as to the happy result of the Conference. It ran as follows:

'A meeting of the Prime Ministers of France and Great Britain took place this afternoon, at which they took advantage to proceed to an exchange of views on the general political situation. It is not to be expected that in the course of one meeting M. Poincaré and Mr Baldwin were able to settle upon any definite solution, but they were happy to establish a common agreement of views and to discover that on no question is there any difference of purpose or divergence of principle which could impair the co-operation of the two countries, upon which depends so much the settlement and peace of the world.'

Practically the whole of the French Press was eminently gracious in its reception of this communiqué, while officially 'agreeable surprise was felt that no attempt had been made to read into it more than it said.'

Pertinax, Philippe Millet, Robert de Jouvenel, and the other diplomatic correspondents were all cordial, although some said that little advance had been made On the other hand, Fleet Street indelicately called the communiqué eye-wash, and even *The Times* said that the ambiguity of the phrasing was a psychological blunder It seemed therefore wise to get the P M away from Paris as quickly as possible, before points of view now happily *d'accord en principe* became less agreeable So after visiting Versailles and being photographed in the Salle des Miroirs Mr and Mrs Baldwin left for London

Their arrival coincided with a telegram from Balmoral announcing the forthcoming visit to Belgrade of the Duke and Duchess of York for the christening of the Infant Prince of Serbia, and expressing the hope of His Majesty that the Prime Minister would allow Ronald to go in attendance Prince Albert was to represent the King and according to custom would also stand godfather to the first-born child in his capacity of *koum* to the King of Serbia Mr Baldwin expressed his dutiful appreciation of the honour extended to his staff and placed Ronald at the disposal of Their Royal Highnesses

In the meantime the delegates from the Dominions and India were arriving for the Imperial Conference At a m ll luncheon given by the Prince of Wales to the four Senior South African delegates, Ronald found himself at the side of the South African Minister of Finance The conversation turned on the Minister's country He had fought on the Boer side in the South African War, and had also been out against the Jameson Raid He had been present at Doornkop He responded to Ronald's interested interrogation and described in detail a farmstead, the mud-bottomed pan, flanked by its two-foot retaining wall, the disposition of the Boers, who, sheltering behind this low wall, watched the leisurely approach in extended order of Jameson's advance guard, and he dwelt upon the futility of the whole affair He described how they opened fire over the head of Jameson's men who rode on through the shallow water They had no wish to kill, said he, because the whole of Jameson's column was surrounded and would be forced to capitulate In fact, he concluded, 'I personally know of only one casualty at that stage' 'Only one?' Ronald said in some surprise 'Yes,' he replied, 'because unfortunately I caused

'it myself' He then described how when contact became too close in his opinion, he had deliberately aimed at the shoulder of an approaching horse, which staggered, fell, and pinned its rider, a mere boy, in the mud, how the boy would almost certainly have been drowned in eighteen inches of muddy water had not a colleague dismounted, pulled him out, and lifting him on to his own saddle, retired with him

Ronald gazed at the narrator in amazement 'Were you using a Martini-Henry rifle?' he asked, and receiving a reply in the affirmative he continued, 'Well, if you will come with me into Sir Godfrey Thomas's room after lunch, I will show you the scar of your own bullet on my knee-cap I was the boy you shot'

The circumstances in which Mr Baldwin had succeeded Bonar Law meant, of course, that his Ministry had been submitted to the King not by himself but by his predecessor The reshuffle consequent upon his vacating the Exchequer, and other considerations — especially Bonar Law's binding pledge that there would be no change in fiscal policy during the existing administration, coupled with the huge inherited majority of 347 seats in the House of Commons — convinced certain of the Prime Minister's colleagues that it was both expedient and safe to go to the country, while the going was good, and to come back with a free hand and a new lease of life The time, they thought, was propitious and the feeling in the country abundantly in their favour

Among those who seemed most determined and sanguine were Colonel Stanley Jackson, the new Chairman of the Party, Admiral Sir Reginald Hall, the chief Agent, and J C Davidson The two former carried the full force of the Unionist Central Office, otherwise the Party machine, and the latter the weightiest pressure on personal grounds Such influential representations could therefore scarcely fail to impress Mr Baldwin, who had already pondered deeply upon the subject while at Aix-les-Bains and was disposed to accept their view He therefore quietly began to prepare his mind for an autumn Election

At this stage, however, any such intention was very closely guarded The country was kept guessing, but returning to Downing Street one day in a taxi-cab, Mr Baldwin spoke to Ronald about his plans for extending the franchise to include what shortly

became known as the 'flapper vote' Ronald's reactions may be judged from his contemporary notes

'Modern mass production has devitalised individual craftsmanship, and the franchise is destroying Statecraft As early as 1885 a grafting operation from the proletariat to the body politic had been performed by the then Lord Salisbury, and, as in the normal course of events, science cannot remain stationary, but must advance, the practice has continued until now, the original Corpus has become almost wholly transformed by this process and notwithstanding its many advantages, the transition has been too sudden, the cost too heavy, and the result is at last producing a danger of creeping paralysis'¹

'No leader can now make adequate provision for the future beyond the life period of his own administration He must take heed primarily to the good health of his own Party because, in his view, the well-being of the Country is dependent thereon In circumstances where it may not be expedient to divulge his motive or real objective, he cannot avoid the public eye, or its quizzing glass, nor dare he coerce his following and thereby risk a failure How could Disraeli, under similar restraint, have rendered his incalculable service to the Empire by raising four million pounds to buy 44 per cent of the capital of the Suez Canal with public opinion against him?'

It is said that arriving on Swindon platform once, a stranger elbowed his way through the crowd, and seized Disraeli by the hand

'Sir, I do not know you,' remarked Disraeli

But that was before the days of mass suffrage

To return, however, to the issue of the moment, it was in this anxious atmosphere that Ronald became immersed in the detail of his third visit to the Balkans with the Duke of York, accompanied now for the first time by the Duchess

On the following Sunday he lunched with them at White Lodge,

¹ During the administration of Lord Melbourne the Electorate numbered one million¹ (1832), Disraeli increased it to two and a half million (1867), Salisbury extended the vote to Agricultural Labourers and others, thus increasing the franchise to five million (1885), Lloyd George, by including women, to over twenty-one million (1918), and Mr Baldwin now proposed to enfranchise an additional five million women down to the age of 21¹ (thus making the proportion of votes to population less than 1 in 2)

Richmond, and came away that afternoon very conscious of the mutual concern felt by Prince Albert and himself as to how the Duchess would stand the strain. This thought was shared unwittingly by her mother, Lady Strathmore, who wrote a touching letter to Ronald from Glamis about her 'little daughter' 'Save her all you can, she is not robust and strong like the Royal Family, and the very long journeys will be a great trial to her although she will never say so and endure to the end.' Ronald tried to reassure her, relying upon the watchful care of a 'devoted husband and of a most dutiful servant,' but none the less these apprehensions were difficult to dislodge.

The two previous Balkan visits of the Duke had clearly established a standard admitting only the minimum of breathing-space and involving the maximum tax upon staying-power, so the prospects of this third experience were neither underestimated, nor were the overlapping demands curtailed in any respect whatever.

The little Duchess, as predicted by Lady Strathmore, stood up to each successive test with the fortitude of her race, but her Lady-in-Waiting collapsed and, following her example, the Duchess was comfortably wrapped up in her bunk for the three days' railway journey home.

There remains one record however, of this overwhelming programme, which is probably unique. At the first *diner intime* after the ceremony, twenty-two covers were laid, and Ronald was present because, as on former occasions, his position was exceptional. But owing to the style and title of the others and the no less remarkable combination, he asked Prince Albert to write out the twenty-one names which appear as follows upon his pencilled list:

- H R H Prince Nicholas of Rumania
- H M Queen Sophie of Greece
- H R H Princess Olga of Greece
- H R H Prince Paul of Serbia
- H M Queen of Rumania
- H R H Duchess of York
- H R H Princess Marita of Greece
- H R H Prince Nicholas of Greece
- H R H Duke of York
- H R H Princess Helena of Serbia
- H M King of Serbia



AT BEI GRADE
Rinald F.R.H. The Duke and Duchess of York H.R.H. The Crown Prince & Princess of Romania The Queen and
King of Rumania

H M King of Rumania
 H R H Crown Princess of Rumania
 H M Queen of Greece
 H R H Princess Irene of Greece
 H R H Prince Paul of Greece
 H R H Crown Prince of Rumania
 H H Princess Henrietta of Serbia
 H R H Prince Arsene of Serbia
 H R H Princess Ileana of Rumania
 H R H Princess Elizabeth of Greece

On Tuesday, the 25th of October, Ronald had arrived at Victoria Station from Belgrade with the Duke and Duchess of York On that same day Mr Baldwin was making a 'cocked hat' speech to a Party Conference meeting at Plymouth, in the course of which he seemed to dispose of any rumour about a prospective General Election, for he dwelt upon the intentions of his government for the relief of unemployment when Parliament met for the Autumn Session He renewed Bonar Law's pledge that no fundamental change in fiscal policy was under contemplation, and then he proceeded to advocate Protection as the only remedy

Everyone was mystified Stories about an appeal to the country were revived, yet Mr Baldwin was understood to infer that they had no foundation On November 9th Lord Stamfordham wrote to Ronald, 'The air is full of rumours of an early appeal to the electorate I know you will tell me should anything definite happen in this direction' And on November 13th at the re-assembling of Parliament, Mr Baldwin immediately announced a Dissolution in order to obtain from the country a Mandate in favour of Protection, and for himself a release from Bonar Law's pledge

Provincial engagements immediately began to mount up in alarming numbers upon his table of fixtures and he spoke himself hoarse at public meetings In Lancashire they were received at Knowsley by Lord Derby, who addressed one meeting himself, Lord Birkenhead a second, and Mr Baldwin a third on the same day All three meetings had produced terrific enthusiasm, and the atmosphere during supper reflected the epitome of sanguine belief No one dreamed of failure, and Lord Birkenhead proposed a sweepstake upon the expected Government majority The figures

selected were enormous and, representing as they did the optimism of such political giants, they seemed convincing Lord Birkenhead himself predicted an increase of Bonar's majority of 347 by nearly fifty seats!

After speaking in the Manchester Free Trade Hall, Mr Baldwin was followed by Winston Churchill, who spoke in opposition, and also received a most enthusiastic welcome there He invited his audience to consider the paradox of Mr Baldwin going to the country on Protection, when for months he had besought Mr MacKenna, an out-and-out Free Trader, to fill the office of Chancellor of the Exchequer

The Polls were declared early in December, with disastrous results to the Government and proportionate gains for Labour The Conservative majority was decreased by 87 Mr Baldwin was confidently expected to resign his Leadership both of the Government and of the Unionist Party Lord Stamfordham wrote to Ronald, 'I am grieved at the result of the election and am naturally seriously thinking, what next'

Lord Esher wrote from Windsor 'I am very anxious to see you, is it possible?' They lunched together at Brooks's Club, and Esher's subsequent letter sufficiently indicates the nature of their conversation, and the part which he played in the interests of the Sovereign

The balance of parties now in the House of Commons was such that while the Government held the greater number of seats, the Labour Party ran them a very good second, and the Liberals had materially increased their strength, so that the determining factor, or the casting vote, lay in the hands of Mr Asquith Lord Esher held the view that, the position being so difficult, the Prime Minister ought not to resign, but should meet Parliament The Crown would then be given a clear opportunity of judging the lie of parties, otherwise the King would be left to the biased views obtainable from Party-leaders and whips

But Mr Baldwin was talking of resigning, and even contemplating the preparation of a Resignation Honours List Officially, no one could protest, suggest, or even inspire him in a matter which concerned him personally and alone Unofficially, however, advice could be offered

Analogous cases had arisen in 1886 when Lord Salisbury had

been defeated by a Liberal-Irish constitution, in 1892 when he had again been defeated, but resigned on the address, and in 1905 when Mr Balfour had been heavily defeated, and yet had retained the Leadership of his Party for three years

As a result when Parliament reassembled Mr Baldwin still remained Prime Minister until Mr Asquith gave his verdict. He declined to support Mr Baldwin's 'disastrous stewardship' or even to criticise it, he said, as that would be to 're-slay the suicide'. The Labour Party therefore moved a vote of censure, and on the 21st January the Administration fell.

At this juncture Mr Baldwin sounded Ronald as to whether he would be willing to continue in the same capacity with Mr Ramsay MacDonald, subject of course to approval, and there was an undefined, though tacit understanding that it would not be for long, that he would in fact be acting as a kind of *trait-d'unon*.

On Mr MacDonald's first visit, as Prime Minister, to Downing Street the proposal was made to him. He acquiesced, and Ronald was formally invited to retain his office at No 10. The three of them sat in the Cabinet Room together, Mr MacDonald, Mr Baldwin and Ronald, who endeavoured to express his appreciation of the compliment which, at his instigation, was then extended to the entire personal staff, whereupon both the retiring and the new Prime Minister agreed that a reversal of their mutual positions would occur *within 9 months*. Thus, for they proved to be absolutely right, are such great political tacticians able to anticipate coming events.

The departure from No 10 of Mr and Mrs Baldwin was a sad parade. The whole staff and all the official servants were gathered in the Hall as the late Prime Minister came down the stairs followed by his wife. Endeavouring to lighten the atmosphere he observed, 'I'm glad we are leaving these lodgings, Cissie, the beds are damp.' 'But, Stan dear,' she rebuked him, 'they're our *own* beds!'

CHAPTER 28

1924

THE POSITION OF MR MACDONALD'S PERSONAL STAFF AT FIRST WAS delicate and difficult. The Prime Minister appeared to trust no one, and, moreover, he was completely inexperienced in the handling and use of a staff. Fortunately a change took place, and only just in time, it would seem, to prevent his inevitable breakdown.

He had instructed Ronald to see that all correspondence marked 'Private' or 'Personal' should be delivered to him unopened. His post-bag ran into hundreds of letters by every delivery, and an abnormal percentage being so marked went straight to him, and was seen no more by his staff.

After about a week of this Ronald took courage and spoke. He explained that in his experience every lunatic in the country sooner or later wrote to the Prime Minister, or to the King, and that an even greater number of loose-thinking folk followed the same course, that the Prime Minister had a trained staff at his disposal waiting in idleness, that he was killing himself, that if he succeeded, he, Ronald, would be blamed, and finally that if he *really* wished to open letters himself, he need only advise his Ministers, followers and friends, when writing privately, to enclose their communications in two envelopes, the inside one bearing the request over signature 'Please hand this unopened to the Prime Minister.'

Ronald was prepared for a severe rebuff, but the Prime Minister placed a hand on his shoulder and said, 'You must remember that never in my life until now have I not had to do everything for myself. Be lenient with me, give me just a fortnight, and you will find me better.' Ronald ventured to make the obvious reply, 'If in a fortnight, why not now?' and received permission to go away and give what orders he liked.

The appointment of a Lord Advocate of Scotland was causing the Prime Minister considerable concern, and of necessity he had deferred any final settlement. At last the delay became really serious and a visit to Edinburgh followed. During the journey

north by train, he told Ronald a great deal about his friend Mr Alexander Grant, at whose house they were to stay

These two were born in neighbouring villages, they had been small boys together, big boys together, and from then onwards, lifelong friends Starting from very humble circumstances, each had risen to great eminence, the one to become Prime Minister of Great Britain, the other an outstanding Captain of industry, but Mr Grant was, and always had been, a staunch Conservative

The Prime Minister said that he never could understand why a Tory Government had not selected so obvious a candidate for one of their Honours Lists, and he took an early opportunity of submitting Mr Grant's name to the King for a Baronetcy, notwithstanding his directly opposite political views

Mr and Mrs Grant received them with the proverbial hospitality of the Highlander, especially so in Ronald's case, since the presence of a stranger in so intimate a little party could easily appear *de trop* Immediately following an early supper the Prime Minister went out on the business which had brought him north, and which subsequently led to the appointment of Mr Hugh P Macmillan, K C , to be Lord Advocate of Scotland

Mrs Grant retired almost at once, and Ronald was thus left alone with her husband until Mr MacDonald rejoined them about midnight During this long interval the conversation turned to the only subject of mutual interest, the Prime Minister Mr Grant could scarcely have felt a greater pride in him had they been brothers, and Ronald learned much about his Chief's boyhood and earlier history which would otherwise never have come his way In this manner the exchange of confidences became increasingly intimate, and Ronald explained his own difficulties and anxieties, which Mr Grant understood and endorsed, knowing the idealism of his friend

One of Mr MacDonald's first actions on arrival at No 10, for example, had been to install a telephone in his own room, communicating with the public, as opposed to the official, exchange, in order to avoid using the latter for private calls He caused Ronald to give explicit instructions to the staff in a similar sense, and to see that the system of franked letters was confined to official correspondence only My experience and belief are that the probity of the Civil Service is far above any little irregularities of this

nature, but in any case these precautions undoubtedly added to the Prime Minister's personal expenditure, and helped to aggravate a situation already somewhat disturbing

Ronald confided to Mr Grant an appreciable number of expenses obligatory upon a Prime Minister by traditional custom, including incidentally the cost of Privy Council dress, which admittedly is considerable. He dilated upon the personal economies which were gradually creeping into practice in order to meet these growing claims, and described, as an example, how the Prime Minister had actually been seen 'strap-hanging' in a public bus at a time when his brain was working at high pressure for twenty hours a day, he dwelt upon the strain to breaking point if a man, already taxed to the uttermost, both mentally and physically, was worried in addition by considerations of personal finance. In fact, Ronald poured out his soul to Mr Grant upon subjects of little account in themselves, but which were troubling him to no small extent.

Up to this point he had no thought beyond the opportunity of talking freely to an extremely intimate and unusually sympathetic friend of Mr MacDonald's, to whom nothing divulged could possibly be regarded as a breach of confidence. But Mr Grant then somewhat staggered him by mentioning the extent of his own income, after taxation, for the previous year, and having regard to the spartan modesty of his personal mode of living, it became obvious that a colossal sum per annum must have been allocated to public benefactions, a fact which subsequently became common knowledge.

Mr Grant said that for years past it had been his wish to put a sum of £40,000 into trust for the benefit of his friend. This sum incidentally meant less to him than a five-pound note had ever meant to his confidant of the moment. Ronald implored him, if that were the case, to equip the Prime Minister at once with a motor-car, which had obviously become essential if his health was to be preserved at all.

He explained that while no actual difficulty arose in obtaining motor transport for the Prime Minister while he was in residence at No 10, such a practice was no doubt permissible, but would be neither compatible with the dignity of the State nor of the First Minister of the Crown if done consistently. Moreover, on

relinquishing office, the claims upon the health and strength of Mr MacDonald would become even more exacting after, than before, having been Prime Minister. In any case the Leader of His Majesty's Opposition filled a role in the service of the State comparable with that of the Leader of His Majesty's Government, since they were so readily interchangeable!

Mr Grant insisted that nothing would give him greater satisfaction, but that Ronald must arrange it as MacDonald was so proud a man, and he so shy. Ronald explained the difficulty of this, stressing the point that while in the short time available he had already become somewhat intimate with the Prime Minister's affairs, he could scarcely extend this privilege to matters directly concerning his private banking account, and that, in fact, Mr Grant must do it himself.

After considerable persuasion, it was mutually agreed that Mr Grant and the Prime Minister should both go off together on the morrow for a motoring excursion into the country of their childhood and that the matter should then be broached and settled. The next day all went according to plan, and on their return Mr Grant squeezed himself into a cloak-room where Ronald was disposing of his Chief's overcoat, he closed the door, and whispered with the air of an excited and happy schoolboy, 'I've done it!'

And that is the story of the famous motor-car for which Ronald was entirely responsible. Neither Mr Ramsay MacDonald nor Mr Alexander Grant had anything whatever to do with it primarily, and yet it was subsequently brought to light in the most scandalous manner by a certain section of the Press which tried to make party capital out of it.

Unfortunately Ronald was never consulted again as to the procedure, or he would have taken advice with a view to avoiding any possibility of misunderstanding or mistake. On the other hand, the proceedings which followed were so childishly innocent in their management, that no sensible person could possibly misinterpret the intention. And when the Prime Minister was attacked in certain quarters for recommending his lifelong friend, though never his political supporter, to the King for a Baronetcy, the members of the opposition in Parliament to a man disclaimed any association with the innuendo that this might have been done as a *quid pro quo*.

Mr MacDonald's submission to the King in favour of his old friend, but political enemy, was the more remarkable because of his scrupulous attitude towards Honours. Upon this subject he dictated the following intimate letter himself, which accurately represents the facts, and his personal reaction:

'I am simply inundated with requests from old friends to have Honours of some kind or the other conferred upon them. The whole of this matter has sunk into a frightful morass until I do not understand why anyone wants to have anything at all, so cheap have public honours become.'

'My intention is to reduce the list to a very minimum. The bundle of claims I have inherited from my predecessor is enormous, and I can do this with all the more conscience because I have refused everything offered to myself.'

It may perhaps be added in this connection that Sir Alexander Grant had consistently contributed £200,000 a year, and probably much more, to the public good in one form or another, and that he was so guileless in the matter of the motor-car that he actually introduced the subject at a Board Meeting of McVitie and Price in order to transfer the requisite Company's shares into trust on this account. The proceedings naturally became public property forthwith. Subsequently Sir Alexander Grant, Bart. (created 1924) provided a Trust Fund of £40,000, the income to be paid to Mr Ramsay MacDonald for life with reversion to his own grandson, Alexander Grant Laing.

Had Ronald not played the leading role in this affair himself, and had there been any question of subterfuge in the Prime Minister's participation in it, as indicated by the more vagabond minds of the Press referred to, any such idea would have been completely dispelled shortly afterwards by an example of the extreme subtlety to which the Prime Minister could lend himself when occasion offered.

The Turkish Minister came to see him, the matter involved high diplomacy. It was intricate, delicate, and unyielding. His Excellency sat impassive of countenance, gentle and obsequious, dexterous of tongue, mentally agile and a master of interlocution. He circumnavigated the subject. The Prime Minister did likewise. They luffed up, bore away again, wore ship, went about, sailed with the wind free, abaft the beam, and on the quarter, but

neither of them ever crossed the line Two hours later, and after an absolutely expert performance of sheer oriental finesse on *both* sides, with nothing lost and everything in *statu quo ante*, His Excellency courteously and gravely sought permission to retire

That very same afternoon the great Zagloul came to see the Prime Minister This interview also lasted two hours Zagloul was staying at Claridge's, and Ronald escorted him back On arrival he remarked in the hall to a member of his suite in Ronald's hearing, 'I can do nothing with him, he knows the cards in my hands before I lay them on the table'

In addition to his difficulties, anxieties and tremendous responsibilities, the new Prime Minister was not spared considerable trouble in regard to his Court Appointments, that is to say, his submission to the King of nominees from his Ministry to fill the great offices of State

Custom decreed that four Ministers should be available for duty in attendance upon the Sovereign These were political appointments, and in the event of State functions, such Ministers would be required to appear in the uniform of His Majesty's Privy Council This produced an initial difficulty, for the new Ministers resisted the idea of gold lace, white breeches, and indeed of sartorial splendour in any form Moreover, the very cogent argument was advanced in all but two instances that they could not afford it

The selection of candidates for these offices was not easy in any case, since experience of Court life was practically negligible in the first Labour Cabinet, but this unexpected opposition on so formal a matter nearly brought the Prime Minister to an *impasse* at the very outset Could any of them get the kit, and if they did, would they wear it? That was the question

Ronald went to see Lord Stamfordham, the King was consulted, and with the consideration and assistance which he now began to extend to his Labour Prime Minister in every direction possible, he at once proposed that the traditional quorum should be reduced from four to three This was indeed a Sovereign gesture, and the Prime Minister made capital play with it The most hardened reactionary could scarcely remain obdurate They melted a little, so Ronald proceeded to ransack all the likely shops where the executors, or remainder men, of defunct Privy Councillors

might have turned gold lace into cash, instead of melting it down into tea services

Three complete outfits were acquired, the Prime Minister obtained two, and Ronald one, which remained in its japanned tin case on the wardrobe of his room until someone could be found to fit it. The Prime Minister seemed very pleased with Ronald about this, but that did not conclude the matter, for it was of real importance involving principles no less great than the offices of State.

Ministers argued, debated, and insisted that clothes did not make the man, and consequently did not matter a damn. The inspired Prime Minister indicated, in more Parliamentary language, that to them would be credited the anomaly of attaching undue importance to a matter assessed by themselves at little or no value at all, and that such a 'song and dance' as they were making would undoubtedly be chronicled by future historians. That is why reference to it is now permissible.

But the resistance offered by Ministers was reduced to mere diffidence by comparison with the relentless attack launched by the Member for Clackmannan and East Stirlingshire, Mr L MacNeill Weir, the Prime Minister's Parliamentary Private Secretary, against these 'fripperies, fal-de-rals, and King's Liveries'. His reaction to this subject was so extreme, and albeit his own good nature so charming, that it became amusing to take him seriously, for he was apparently unaware of his personal inconsistency. Ronald made the following note about him in this particular connection: 'The very idea of Ministers appearing in Court dress, or Privy Councillor's kit, is anathema to Weir! And yet he is eminently a King's man and loyal as a leech. He loathes sartorial display, although his own tailoring exalts him above most men in the House of Commons. He is shaped in the tall, thin mould of Viscount Willingdon. He is an "exquisite" in matters of dress. His linen conspicuously beautiful, his black silk stock tied *en cravate*, all set off his aristocratic head to perfection. The *cachet* of his clothes recalls the exclusive creation of Savile Row's Mr Pool at a period date. His picturesque figure, *facile* dignity, and natural refinement are irresistibly attractive. It is precisely the type that with easy courage would have strolled to the guillotine, disturbed a little, perhaps, by the unavoidable

effect of the *Conciergerie* upon the normal perfection of his *jabot*, but with an indulgent and forgiving smile, sniffing carelessly at a sweet-scented herb "to keep off the smell of the common people" It has probably not occurred to him that apart from his ability and interesting versatility—he has been journalist, actor, sailor, teacher, and lecturer on political economy—the Prime Minister may have chosen him as a Parliamentary Private Secretary because of his superlative appearance "Comrade" Weir is an altogether delightful addition to the staff'

In pursuance of these happenings there were two immediate results Firstly, the King was established by the body politic (as represented by his Government) in a newly born sphere of popularity, and secondly, the Ministers respectively concerned put aside their austerity and did gentle dalliance before a cheval glass, adorned in their unaccustomed finery

The Prime Minister sent for Ronald one evening Said he incidentally, 'By the way, that sword doesn't appear to fit' (He meant in its scabbard) 'You know about swords, just have a look at it, it is on my bed' Ronald had the necessary look The sword had been returned back to front and was rammed home with the determination peculiar to its new owner Ronald taxed him with pirouetting in front of a mirror He blushed, then beamed all over his face and gently accepted the just rebuke A tug-of-war lasting some fifteen minutes extracted the recalcitrant weapon, which was then returned correctly to its place

The King made a point of meeting his Ministers individually with a view to extending his official relationship to a more personal status, e g by way of putting Mr Wheatley at his ease, His Majesty asked him searching questions about his early days, dating in fact from his childhood Mr Wheatley drew a vivid picture of his parents, eight children and a baby, all living in two exceedingly small rooms Briefly reviewing this period, he explained that one of the two rooms was then let to a lodger

'But, Mr Wheatley,' interrupted the King, 'if there were eleven in the family, why on earth was one of the rooms dispensed with?'

'Well, Sir,' replied Mr Wheatley, 'my father had to find the rent, you see'

The King repeated this story in its pathetic detail, rather

inferring that it went against himself, since Wheatley's reasoning left him speechless

During this same series of meetings the Socialistic attitude towards the Constitution and the Monarchy was expressed to the King in these words 'Oh, yes, Sir, we like you, because we think you provide the cheapest alternative'

Without disrespect to His Majesty, his Government, or his Navy, it may be conceded that the early training of the former in the last-named Service, equipped him most effectively to handle his Ministers, in this first Labour Government, with the skill and in the way he did

His Ministers had individuality and good nature The King appreciated both Their personal affection for him became apparent in many unexpected ways, so that six years later, the following spontaneous outbursts of feeling occurred when the second Labour Government came in

The King had been very ill, and one of his first acts was to hold a Council at which Ministers were sworn A popular stalwart of the newly formed Cabinet took the opportunity of congratulating the King upon his recent recovery 'It isn't these medicos that did it,' said he with a gesture towards the Court Physicians present, one of whom told Ronald the story immediately afterwards, 'it was your own bloody guts'

Much good-humoured criticism has been levelled at Mr Thomas for the persistent disregard of his aspirates, but with his proven capacity for assimilating facts, and for adapting himself to environments, it is difficult to believe that this is less of a pose for the express purpose of window-dressing, than was the wearing of an orchid by Mr Joseph Chamberlain In any case the *obiter dictum* of good form in this connection seems to be a fallaciously fickle guide That which in the case of Mr Thomas is tolerated but would scarcely pass in a lesser man, was not only very much accepted as the height of excellence, but was deliberately cultivated by a generation which overlapped his own

An unexpected justification followed these early preparations, for during the short life of the Government, two series of Court entertainments had to be arranged with all their splendour and pageantry The occasions were the official visit of the King and Queen of Rumania, followed by that of the King and Queen of

Italy A Court Ball had not been held for over ten years, in fact, since pre-war days, so even old experienced Court Officials had to revise their full-dress wardrobes, and refurbish disused adjuncts to ceremonial, while the Royal Mews reassembled long-neglected trappings of State

His Majesty's Labour Ministers now found themselves suddenly translated from comparative obscurity to the floodlight of regal magnificence, wherein they gained universal respect So little known were they before, that a leading hostess had asked Ronald what Mr Ramsay MacDonald's table manners were like? 'I mean,' said she, 'does he use a knife and fork properly?'

In face of such knotty problems it was no easy matter to lighten the load which the Prime Minister had to carry Never perhaps in the history of this country has a First Minister of the Crown assumed office in circumstances of greater personal difficulty, or shouldered a burden of such stupendous proportions In addition to, and in default of any member of his Party to whom he cared to entrust the Foreign Office, perhaps the most exacting Department of State at that particular time, he became Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs himself The King remonstrated with him on first receiving this proposal, because of the tremendous obligations involved, but there appeared to be no alternative

During the first fortnight at No 10 Downing Street, a sofa in Mr MacDonald's own room was filled every night, after his return from the House of Commons, with Foreign Office boxes He dealt with these during the remainder of the night, and no evidence was available from the household staff, or from the night porters, that he went to bed at all On three specific occasions Ronald verified the fact in person by finding the Prime Minister still at work between the hours of 2 and 4 a m And this double role exposed him to more than his normal share of criticism on personal no less than on Party and political grounds

It was even believed, for instance, by certain enthusiastic though perhaps disappointed followers, that he favoured the fleshpots of Mayfair, that he courted the great ones of Society, and that he readily succumbed to the glamour of the Court, that he descended in fact to the dungeons of Snobbery This in Ronald's experience was very far from the truth, but anyone brought up at a distance from the purple, and yet finding himself

in the heart of it, must necessarily be more exposed to detraction than the established courtier

A closer and more intimate knowledge of his reactions would seem to prove conclusively that while the novelty perhaps entertained and attracted him towards a closer view of social and state ceremonial, yet his larger conception remained adamant beyond the proper demands of his office. Instances are numerous, but the following letter speaks for itself, written at a later date when he had held the Premiership, was still in the position of leader of His Majesty's Opposition, with all its attendant social obligations, and still carried the full prestige of a potential First Minister of the Crown which in due course materialised again.

THE HILLOCKS,
LOSSIE MOUTH

5th June, 1925

MY DEAR WATERHOUSE,

Miss Rosenberg has written me about the Courts. I am truly sorry, but I knew nothing about them until they were over, my reading of newspapers is confined to other columns. Surely when official duty or the showing of respect are involved, the occasions should be notified somehow, especially as there is now a small crowd of us who never look at Society doings. If you think of it when you see Stamfordham, you might explain this and make my peace. What are these 'Drawing Rooms'? If attending one is not essential to Righteousness, I shall not do so. Ishbel is absorbed in her work at Bow, which takes up practically all her time, but — we shall do what is necessary.

As a result, Mr MacDonald asked Ronald to get him excused attendance. Such duties were delegated consistently thereafter, and even when Queen Alexandra died, he telephoned Ronald

'Be a good fellow and indite the necessary message on my behalf in terms suitably related to those conveying the Prime Minister's feelings.'

CHAPTER 29

1924

ANOTHER FACTOR WHICH HAD ITS IMMEDIATE REACTION UPON OUR first Labour Government was occasioned by the fall of the French Cabinet, and the advent of M Herriot's *Cartel des Gauches* administration, which almost synchronised with the birth of our own. It was desirable that the two Premiers should meet as early as possible and at Ronald's behest a close friend undertook to negotiate this. On the 12th June he wrote as follows

'Having arrived in Paris on the night of Monday the 10th I saw Herriot at midday on Tuesday and I dined alone with him that night. I informed him absolutely confidentially of the points with which it seemed to me that he ought to be conversant before meeting Mr Ramsay MacDonald, based upon our conversation.'

'I found Herriot possessed of a very pronounced leaning towards an immediate understanding with Great Britain. His actual words to me were as follows

"No peace in Europe is possible without a genuine and permanent co-operation between the democracies of England and France. The foundations of the British policy are identical with my own, for I have always regarded Great Britain and France as complementary to each other, and it would be my ambition as President to bring this conviction to a political reality."

"I am not yet fully seized of the subject, since I have had no opportunity of studying the Quai d'Orsay records, and base my views in consequence solely upon what I have gathered from M Millerand and M Poincaré. So far as I understand it, however, the question turns primarily upon the Franco-Belgian Railways, and to this my personal attention will be turned in the first instance with the full conviction that I should be able to find a means of agreement with the views of Mr Ramsay MacDonald."

*

'I emphasised the desirability of his paying a visit to England at the earliest possible moment and he readily agreed that no

time must be lost He intends to form his cabinet to-morrow night, Friday 13th, make his announcement on Saturday the 14th, deal summarily with the inevitable questions *and leave for London on the 20th June*

★

'I would have written you at great length were I not due to leave Paris in a few minutes for Geneva in connection with the Conference of the League of Nations

'Can you appreciate my state of mind during these interminable Anglo-French negotiations? I am like unto a child whose parents, at variance, are feeling the pulse of divorce I, in the interests of my own country seek a solution whereby to find myself no longer bereft of my father or of my mother — and with what happiness therefore should I welcome the Anglo-French understanding which I await with such impatience!'

M Herriot accordingly came to this country Ronald met him at the station in London and escorted him by road to Chequers where the Prime Minister was waiting to receive him

Ronald was drawn to M Herriot from the first moment of their meeting It may well be that he was influenced by the kind and genial manner, or perhaps he was a little flattered by the extremely intimate subjects embarked upon No sooner had M Herriot recovered from his amazement at the size of London, which, by the road they took, extends for at least twelve miles before yielding to open country, than he questioned Ronald closely about the French Ambassador He bombarded him with embarrassing enquiries, fortunately in such rapid succession that before discovering how to answer the first it was possible to sidestep the whole series

M de Saint Aulaire, the French Ambassador, had very poor sight, so weak in fact that he frequently failed to recognise people to whom he should have been actually speaking This caused him to give a somewhat aloof impression, but in reality he was one of the wittiest men in London when at his ease Ronald knew him not only officially but personally, and since their first meeting in Morocco in 1913 he had admired him considerably, so when M Herriot began to deprecate his aristocratic presence — '*C'est un homme trop boutonne*,' he complained, '*avec son chapeau haut de forme*,' encumbered with which '*il fait toujours pattes de velours*' — Ronald,

recognising the two portents of this opening and the implied compliment to himself, replied that nevertheless '*C'est un type cossu, très calé,*' which provoked mutual mirth, and Herriot, becoming still more friendly, invited further confidences

So Ronald told him the following story A friend in the Corps Diplomatique and a colleague of M de Saint Aulaire had honoured him recently, said Ronald, with an invitation to dine informally at his house It was a *partie carree* and Ronald arrived three minutes early The remaining guests were the senior member of the Legation and the French Ambassador who had not yet appeared He hurried in ten minutes late Profuse apologies Affectionate salutations 'I had occasion to visit the Foreign Office unexpectedly, but urgently, late this afternoon,' he explained 'Result — completely abortive The door was slammed in my face! I ran back to my Chancellerie I drafted a priority despatch to my Government "*Je viens de recevoir un coup de pied dans le derrière stop Est-ce que je l'ai senti stop*" The situation was lamentable but formidable I restored myself and waited Impossible, my dear fellow, in such circumstances, to quit my Chancellerie without a reply in my pocket At last! After agonies of apprehension, *la voilà!* "*Le bon Dieu ne vous a pas donné des yeux dans le derrière alors vous n'avez rien vu*" *C'est à cause de ça, mon cher, que je suis en retard, mais enfin voilà vingt cent mille balles de sauvees — A ce qui parait, j'avais donné tête baissée!*"

M Herriot absorbed this eulogistic sidelight upon His Excellency, which he called *de la blague*, but was disinclined to abandon his deprecatory view of the Ambassador M de Saint Aulaire, he said, was a *poseur, a flaneur*, and I think that Ronald must have been the first English official to learn — as he did during this conversation — that his old friend M de Fleuriau, formerly Councillor of the French Embassy in London under M Cambon and now serving his country in China, would shortly seek the formal *agrement* when presenting his credentials at the Court of St James

On arrival at Chequers by way of Princes Risborough they approached the house from Great Kimble Lodge and drove down the long drive winding through a dense box wood

The two Labour Prime Ministers greeted each other with great cordiality Although Ramsay MacDonald's freedom in French was negligible, and M Herriot had no English, they contrived to

understand each other merrily enough¹. The political difficulties of each made a direct appeal to the other, a common bond of sympathy was manifest between them from the outset, and a strong personal link was forged.

The usual innocuous but satisfactory communique was accordingly issued for public consumption announcing that on Saturday and Sunday, the 21st and 22nd of June, 'A friendly and informal discussion was held on the several questions arising out of the Dawes Report and the measures to be taken in order to put it into execution.'

'No definite conclusion could, of course, be arrived at ... but the conversation revealed general agreement between the French and British point of view and, on the part of the two Prime Ministers, a common determination to meet the difficulties which beset their countries.'

'It was agreed that ... a Conference should be held in London not later than the middle of July for the purpose of definitely settling the procedure to be adopted.'

'The two Prime Ministers also agree to pay a brief visit to Geneva together at the opening of the Assembly of the League of Nations in September next.'

These were no minor additions to an already overloaded list of future commitments. Mr MacDonald subsequently opened the Conference of thirty-four Nations at the League Assembly, and this session at Geneva was memorable for at least one outstanding feature. Both Mr MacDonald and M Herriot had made most conciliatory approach to Germany with a view to her adhesion to the League of Nations, but an unexpected *bouleversemement* in the form of a somewhat truculent reply from Stresemann reviving the question of responsibility for the War was already being mentioned.² At that point Dr Nansen handed Ronald a copy of the following telegram which he had despatched to Stresemann at 5 p.m. on Saturday, September 6th:

¹ Mr Neville Chamberlain, speaking in the House of Commons, as Prime Minister, on the 10th of November 1937, said of Mr Ramsay MacDonald after his death 'His ability to handle an International gathering ... was all the more remarkable because he spoke no other language than his own, and understood very little of any other tongue.'

² Possibly Rathenau had correctly interpreted the official German view when he described the League of Nations as a 'playground for worn-out Statesmen'!

'As a true friend of Germany I venture to suggest that Germany can now, if she applies, enter the League of Nations with her honour intact as a Great Power. The French too are ready for this. To send the note on responsibility for the War would entirely change the situation and would be taken as a reply to MacDonald's and Herriot's friendly invitation. I venture to ask, in the name of the future of Europe, whether it would not be possible at least not to deliver the note on Monday'

FRIDTJOF NANSEN'

Ronald went with the Prime Minister to Paris, to Geneva and to Paris again. He saw M. Herriot exhausted and at the end of his tether after deliberations extending through the night. He walked down the great stairway of the Quai d'Orsay with him at nearly 4 a.m. *bras dessus, bras dessous*. Herriot was in a state of mental anxiety and physical undoing when Ronald whispered to him, 'Rely completely upon my chief, lean your whole weight upon him, he is strong enough for both.' And it was so.

Two or three hours earlier in the night, Herriot had opened a drawer, in the magnificent Louis XIV writing-table at which he sat, and extracted a new pipe. This, in mid-Conference, he handed to Ronald, and it is called 'la pipe Herriot'. And seated around him in silent wonder at this lapse from Presidential decorum were MM. Sedoux, Perriotti, Bergerie, and Parmentier of the French Treasury, with the British Prime Minister, his Ambassador, Sir Eyre Crowe, Mr. Walford Selby, and the famous interpreter M. Camerlyncke.

It was indeed a feverish period, and any pretension to write an account of the official activities of Mr. MacDonald's first Labour administration in his dual capacity of Premier and Foreign Secretary would involve an attempt to reconcile the programme of successive engagements and events which encompassed him with the time available for their considered performance or reasoned decision. Yet Ronald was with him from first to last and never once saw him ill-humoured or impatient.

In the course of completing his Cabinet the Prime Minister confided (to Ronald) that he was at a loss to discover someone who would be of real value to him on questions relating to India, and after some finesse and considerable pressing he admitted, as an example, the name of Lord Chelmsford, not of course to put at the

India Office, since he was an ex-Viceroy, but as a guiding influence to his Cabinet It was out of the question, however, to approach him because his politics would naturally be unfavourable to a Labour Government But he could nevertheless think of no one with the desired experience who would be 'less unobtainable'

Ronald reminded him that notwithstanding its aims and policy the present Labour Government was first of all His Majesty's Government, and that such a proposal as he had in mind, whether acceptable or not, could only be regarded as a very high compliment when made by the First Minister of the Crown So it was decided that while the Prime Minister would commit his invitation to paper Ronald should feel the pulse in anticipation

The following Friday Captain Lascelles on the staff of the Prince of Wales asked Ronald to see him at York House He explained that his father-in-law, Lord Chelmsford, was faced with a difficult decision occasioned by the above-mentioned proposal and would Ronald meet him — this procedure had been agreed previously between them — so the meeting was arranged for that same afternoon and proved a long one

After discussing the matter at great length Lord Chelmsford readily accepted Ronald's contention that when a Prime Minister says, 'Will you come and help me as Chief Adviser to the Crown to submit to the Sovereign the wisest counsel possible?' he is sinking party politics and personal considerations in favour of the best interests of the State By family tradition, however, Lord Chelmsford's instinct had a Tory bias, although like a true official with a long record of public service, he had no particular party leaning That being so Ronald felt that it was perhaps beyond his competence to venture any further, as the question would seem to be whether or not Lord Chelmsford should join a Labour Cabinet as a non-party and solely as a Constitutional Member But, he added, there was one opinion which might be acceptable and would certainly be valuable, namely, that of Mr Baldwin It was accordingly resolved that Ronald should so arrange

Mr Baldwin loved Chequers scarcely less than his own home He was spending his last week-end there, and having off-loaded his burden was in no mood to shoulder any further botheration Ronald telephoned him at once on the official Treasury line and asked if he would forgo his customary walk on Sunday and be

available instead for an interview of importance This he resolutely refused But, insisted Ronald, if he knew the purpose, or the person (neither of which could be explained at the moment), he would recognise the necessity No, Mr Baldwin was obdurate He had put up the shutters and was not going to open them again for anyone Very well, said Ronald, you really must trust me in this matter, etc and finally Mr Baldwin relented, and the appointment, with an unknown individual for a purely speculative purpose, was promised

After dinner that night Ronald telephoned again, but this time on the public line, and said to Mr Baldwin 'the name I was unable to give you earlier in the day was Lord Chelmsford' The meeting took place at Chequers, and as a result Lord Chelmsford became First Lord of the Admiralty in Mr Ramsay MacDonald's administration on Mr Baldwin's recommendation

Meanwhile the Government was deeply concerned with the Irish Boundary Commission, the International Conference with French and German representatives over the evacuation of the Ruhr, and negotiations to revive trade with Russia by the medium of a Russian Loan

In Dublin a Mission headed by Mr J H Thomas and Mr Arthur Henderson was active, and by August 6th had come to a healthy compromise The International Conference had reached a notably cordial stage, although the Germans were clinging doggedly to their objections And the Russian negotiations, designed to recover an apparently hopeless bad war debt, and to restore our sadly mourned loss of trade, had assumed a chameleon-like character Three days previously the Russian Delegates had categorically repudiated figures considered fair by His Majesty's Government, on the 4th August negotiations broke down altogether, and now Rakovsky, the Russian Chargé d'Affaires in London, brought them to life again Only one of his colleagues, a Moscow representative of a pronounced red hue, was holding out If he could be toned down it seemed possible that a better colour scheme might prevail, and harmony be restored

The Prime Minister was extending himself to the uttermost in this connection On 14th April they had lunched with him at No 10 They enjoyed a somewhat speculative common language, for each delegate expressed himself in his own dialect M Schein-

mann, seated between the Prime Minister and Ronald, assured him in a parody of French that every one of his compatriots at the table 'ought to have been shot long ago' Presently Ronald's left-hand neighbour, M Berenf, confided exactly similar sentiments about Rakovsky and Scheinmann Ronald was translating into English this singular message when Mr J D Gregory, in charge of the Russian Section of the Foreign Office, announced that Rakovsky, sitting between him and Mr MacDonald on the opposite side of the table, had just expressed himself in identical terms about all the delegates An otherwise agreeable luncheon party terminated without eliciting any further information of importance

But the Russian position was not easy, for having consistently proclaimed their inability to meet one iota of their liabilities, they were now threatened with the prospect of attack by the bond-holders and property owners, so they explored every possibility of raising a private loan, although, of course, without success The next step was to enable them to re-establish their credit by Government assistance, it being clear that no other solution existed, but the terms were naturally deferred until the Treaty came to be definitely negotiated The Russians were thus at the limit of their resources

If they declined to accept the Government figures there would be no loan, so their only course was to withdraw their own repudiation of liability In that case His Majesty's Government would gain all it set out to achieve, including the resumption of proper trade relations between the two countries Alternatively, no further move on our part was possible, but the responsibility for an even worse situation than before could scarcely rest with the Government since the loan proposition was a concession without parallel

Parliament was expected to reassemble on 14th October, but in view of the Summer Recess, and the Baldwin-MacDonald nine months' pact, the time was approaching when the Labour administration would be called upon to surrender its lease In case there should be any difficulty about this, Fate intervened with the provision of a double-barrelled airgun, loaded in each breach with a pellet of Communistic colour, to blow Mr MacDonald out of Office

By the beginning of August, considerable alarm was felt in

Government circles over what came to be known as the Campbell Case. An article had appeared in *The Worker's Weekly*, which, in the opinion of Sir Patrick Hastings, the Attorney-General, was actionable under the 'Incitement to Mutiny Act'. The Editor was arrested. Feeling ran high among the back benchers of the Labour Party. They held that the article was legitimately addressed to the combatant forces, exhorting them to abstain from interference in industrial disputes, and that the Attorney-General's action was an unwarrantable attack upon the freedom of the Press.

Both the Prime Minister and Sir Patrick Hastings were assailed by their own Party, and heckled by the Opposition. Government supporters insisted that Mr MacDonald had condoned an exactly analogous offence previously, and was now supporting the arrest of the alleged victim. The extremists declared that if the public prosecution continued, they would have the Prime Minister subpoenaed, and cross-examined in the witness-box by the ablest Barristers-at-Law, who were at that moment smiling wryly from the Opposition benches, and enjoying the situation.

Meanwhile the Attorney-General discovered that Campbell was not in fact the editor at all, but only acting as *locum tenens*. He was moreover a cripple from war wounds, and had been decorated for gallantry.

As a result, the charge against Campbell was withdrawn, but the Prime Minister had not intervened, and the matter dragged on until October.

A furious Debate followed during which Mr MacDonald was severely attacked by Sir John Simon and Mr Austen Chamberlain in the House of Commons. He was now accused by the Opposition of misdirecting the course of justice by causing the case against Campbell to be dropped. He made an equivocal reply, and then corrected it. Sir Robert Horne moved a vote of censure on the Government for the Conservatives, and Sir John Simon moved an amendment for the Liberals. The Prime Minister replied in fighting spirit. He said that if the House passed either of these resolutions, the Government would go. Whereupon Mr Asquith, in lighter vein, accused the Prime Minister of delivering the funeral oration before the doctor had pronounced life extinct — strangely reminiscent of his refusal only a few months previously to 're-slay the suicide' by condemning Mr Baldwin's Government!

— And then the Conservatives withdrew their motion, but voted for the Liberal Amendment

So on the 8th of October 1924 the first Labour Government fell. The first barrel of the airgun had done its work, and the prediction made mutually by Mr MacDonald and Mr Baldwin on the 22nd of January — namely, that the life of the Labour administration would not extend to more than nine months — was fulfilled with a margin of fourteen days to spare.

Thus accurately, as observed on a previous occasion, are such experienced tacticians able to foretell events, and in the view of so apparently correct a diagnosis, Ronald began to speculate upon the considerations which might lead the King to grant a Dissolution if required.

As in the case of Bonar Law's resignation nearly eighteen months previously, the possibility presented itself of other Ministers being invited to form a Cabinet as an alternative to the Prime Minister, but the position now appeared as follows:

The Prime Minister showed no intention whatever of resigning, but if forced to do so, might ask the King to dissolve Parliament.

His justification for so doing could be analysed thus:

1 Analogy of Stanley Baldwin, who having a majority in the House was nevertheless granted a Dissolution.

2 In the present composition of the House any Government (short of complete Coalition between Conservative and Liberal) would be in a similar position, and therefore to avoid a General Election at the present time would only be to postpone it.

3 Any Minister forming another Government now would find himself faced with a miniature election, because all the Members of his Cabinet holding offices of profit under the Crown, would have to recontest their seats.

4 A refusal of Dissolution by the King would certainly be regarded by the whole Labour mentality in the Country as a dismissal of his Prime Minister (*vide* Anson, vol I, p 306, and Dicey, p 356), and therefore a slap in the face.

The Prime Minister regarded the Labour Movement as a powerful body grown to maturity along natural lines, and one which since its assumption of power had been nourished upon a healthy diet, it was, in his opinion, the stoutest buffer between the Constitution and Communism. If now it became impoverished and reacted to what might be interpreted as neglectful

treatment, there was a danger of its becoming an easy prey to the virulent disease of Communism

5 With a new Government, other than Labour, Foreign Policy would commence *de novo*, and the work of past months would be rendered useless

In view of these considerations it seemed clear that the alternatives open to the Prime Minister would be

- a* Announcement of resignation
- b* Announcement of intention to ask for Dissolution
- c* Announcement that, in the absence of the King from London, it would be necessary to defer any statement

On the following day Mr MacDonald asked the King to dissolve Parliament In his view no Party, as then constituted, was able to form a Government, the combination in the House of Commons on the 8th October had been deliberately intended to end the life of the Government, and if it escaped defeat now, a similar attack would be hurled against it a few weeks later

Mr MacDonald threw himself into his election not only with zest, but with all the vigour at his command He travelled everywhere, quartering the North of England and Scotland He fought a terrific campaign in his desperate determination to come back victorious, with no *arrière pensée* or limit of life And in the midst of the struggle the second barrel of the airgun went off

The Prime Minister arrived at Chequers in an exhausted condition for a few hours' respite The following morning he telephoned Ronald asking him to try to discover how, or from whom, the *Daily Mail* had got hold of a copy of the Zinoviev letter There were apparently several copies in existence One had emerged at this psychological moment from a Foreign Office box sent to meet the Prime Minister at Chequers

The origin of this letter is wrapped in obscurity It was addressed by the Third International at Moscow to the Headquarters of the British Communists, and signed by the President Zinoviev It was a red-hot incitement to armed insurrection and Civil War in retaliation for the opposition being manifested in England to the proposed Russian Treaty

A devastating searchlight would be turned upon relations between the Labour Government and Soviet Russia, and the *Daily Mail* were going to publish it It would, of course, annihilate the

Anglo-Russian Treaty which had been so laboriously prepared by the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Mr Arthur Ponsonby, with the Russian Charge d'Affaires, M Rakovsky, and which was now only awaiting its passage through Parliament. It would automatically eclipse every other official or political consideration and, in the middle of an election campaign, it would produce an overwhelming effect in the Country.

But this document was sent direct to Mr MacDonald as Foreign Secretary, and Supreme Head of the Foreign Office. And he had not referred either to his Under-Secretary of State, or to his Permanent Secretary, Sir Eyre Crowe, or to his Private Secretary in the Diplomatic Service, but to Ronald at No 10, who thus found himself in the difficult position of having to act literally on instructions without reference to anyone at the Foreign Office.

Ronald, being on excellent terms with the Press, immediately put the question point blank to a very senior person connected with the *Daily Mail*, and the result of this preliminary move was somewhat illuminating. The answer was, 'I cannot tell you, but — find out who was dining with Marlowe (the editor) at the Savoy on Friday night.' The description subsequently given of Mr Marlowe's guest on that occasion applied to a high official, quite unconnected with the Foreign Office, but so easily identifiable on account of a disability unique in the official world, that no further doubt remained as to the answer.

Meanwhile, the Cabinet set up a special committee to investigate the question of genuineness of the document, and Mr MacDonald also sent a message to Mr Marlowe asking if the *Daily Mail* could throw any light on the matter.

But the *Daily Mail* were not able to offer assistance and he then decided to accept the letter, not as spurious, but as *genuine*! He wrote a reply attacking the Soviet, with whom he had been so diligently anxious to bring about a rapprochement to end in a Treaty, and hoping thereby to placate the Opposition, who were of course accusing him of conspiracy with Communism. But he brought upon himself a storm of abuse from his own Party who were fighting the election upon the Russian Treaty and the Russian Loan. He was thus smitten between the hammer and the anvil. The election was lost, and Ronald held his peace about Mr Marlowe's guest at the Savoy.

One of the final acts incumbent upon a Minister vacating office involves the time-honoured payment of gratuities to his official servants. In the case of Mr Ramsay MacDonald this became a particularly heavy infliction because of his dual responsibility both at the Foreign Office and at No 10.

His personal finances had been admittedly severely strained, so Ronald and Mr Walford Selby, Private Secretary to the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, set themselves to discover if any relief could be obtained from appropriate Funds available. They were thus able to reduce the figure to a perfectly legitimate minimum. But when Ronald approached the Prime Minister with this seemingly rather satisfactory account, Mr MacDonald asked if it represented the exact itemisation prepared for his predecessors. The procedure had to be explained, and was rejected out of hand. Mr MacDonald preferred to mortgage his personal requirements rather than to evade the recognised claims of his office, and unlike his predecessors, when vacating office, he was not contemplating any submission to the King in respect of a retiring List of Honours.

With Mr MacDonald's avowed views upon this subject, so extreme a departure from precedent was perhaps not surprising, yet on the other hand he had experienced too many instances of unrequited devotion during his own political or professional career to leave him unresponsive where merit made its appeal. In his present sphere, moreover, Honours conferred by the Sovereign were respected even by himself. On principle he felt no inclination to advise the King in this sense. He had no desire, for instance, even to submit the name of his Chief Whip to be sworn of the Privy Council, yet to refrain from so doing might damage his party in days to come, and expose his own judgement in appointing him to office. So being a man of easy mental rectitude, he thus found himself at variance with his firmly established convictions. He reflected profoundly, and at last tendered his recommendations.

On Friday, 7th November, five names appeared in the *London Gazette*, viz. The Financial Secretary to the Treasury, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Treasury (i.e. the Chief Whip), and the Legal Adviser to the Foreign Office. His own Private Secretary at the Foreign Office, and his assistant Secretary at No 10, were honoured with the Royal Victorian Order, which

does not come within the submission of the Prime Minister, but rests with the Sovereign alone, and Mr MacDonald had also included Ronald's name in his submission for the Companionship of Honour. In view of his previous appointments in the same capacity to two Leaders of the House of Commons, followed by two Prime Ministers, and to the fact that he was remaining at No 10, this particular recommendation was deferred, and became a legacy.

CHAPTER 30

1925-1926

DURING HIS FIRST WEEK AT CHEQUERS MR BALDWIN REVIEWED HIS letters of congratulation, for the benediction of his friends brought him great happiness He cherished this epistolatory symposium and inhaled the welcome aroma, but one particular exhibit, carrying the fragrance and colour of a master's choice, struck him especially as the brightest blossom in all these ample bouquets It came as the offering of a famous diplomat

Ronald obtained permission to deal with this in company with the others, but he received instructions to keep it with particular care for preservation among the more cherished tributes and trophies Within a few minutes of returning to No 10 he verified his conviction that it was a facsimile of the letter sent in similar circumstances, and of course by the same hand, to Mr Ramsay MacDonald the previous year

No one, except the author, would ever have known this but for the fact that Ronald unfortunately handled the two He indited a reply to the second wholly different in character, though in terms no less appreciative, than his own acknowledgment of the first, and his signature appeared on both

It is a somewhat sad reflection that while experience adds to one's power of appreciation, hardship may either stimulate or distort it Harold Begbie crumpled badly, under the sickening sight of war, which revolted his artistic sense The battlefields, hospitals and immense machinery in all its horrible detail left burning scars upon his vivid imagination As a result of his high-speed tour abroad with Ronald in 1914, he gradually forsook the sphere of armed contention and espoused the cause of conscientious objection Before the war came to an end his enthusiasm had become an inhibition, his emotions an impediment He treated Fleet Street with contumely and his publishers with disrespect But during the eleven years which followed he had become intimate with Ronald, and had been his frequent guest as often as the fullness of their respective lives would permit

One night in May 1925 they dined together and talked both freely and impartially about a matter—a very regrettably controversial case—concerning a well-known lady of distinction and charm who had no enemies but many impetuous friends. The next day there appeared in *John Bull* a trouncing indictment of both Mr Baldwin and Ronald. This was written by 'A Gentleman with a Duster,' the soubriquet which Harold Begbie had taken infinite care to protect and which he firmly believed still concealed his identity.

'Mr Baldwin,' he wrote, 'said the other day that of late he had been talking too much. He proceeded to add that his themes had been worthy ones, namely, Truth, Beauty, Goodness.'

Mr Baldwin owes no little of his popularity to this conviction. He is not a great man, but he has the true ring of a good man. He has convinced a vast number of people that he cares for virtue.

'But certain people are beginning to wonder whether something in his nature, either indolence or nervousness, does not prevent him from attacking, like an authentic warrior of truth, beauty, and goodness, the arch-enemy of virtue wherever he may show his ugly, repulsive head.'

'Unfortunately the Prime Minister let slip the other day an enviable opportunity of convincing the world that he is a man of genuine courage. A question was put to him in the House of Commons. Mr Baldwin's reply to this question was not the answer of a man who had studied the serious facts for himself.'

It was a clerk's answer, a coached answer, an official answer, and so far as one can gather the Prime Minister was coached for his answer by no-one except Colonel Sir Ronald Waterhouse.

'Who is Colonel Sir Ronald Waterhouse? At the outbreak of war he was a retired Captain of Cavalry, a young man too delicate in health to take a combatant part in hostilities. His first post, I believe, was in the Passport Office [sic]. How he came so swiftly to the rank of Colonel and the honour, if it is still an honour, of Knighthood, I do not accurately know.'

'In any case this lucky warrior is now Colonel Sir Ronald Waterhouse and he occupies a very curious position in the Government of this country. Whoever may come or go from 10 Downing Street, Colonel Sir Ronald Waterhouse remains. He served Mr Bonar Law, he served Mr Ramsay MacDonald and he is again serving Mr Baldwin. The political opinions of

a Prime Minister apparently make no difference to this confidential and powerful servant. He is prepared to serve his country with a sublime indifference to the trivial differences of Party Politics.

'It is obvious that Sir Ronald Waterhouse is something of a buffer between the Prime Minister and the public. He must keep boors away from Downing Street and appease the wrath of indignant correspondents.'

'The last thing he desires is the disturbance of his Master's ease. I am quite certain he would sacrifice his own ease over and over again rather than worry the Prime Minister about matters which he considers that he himself is amply competent to deal with.'

'But is it not possible that in his anxiety to secure the ease of the Prime Minister this Secretarial Vicar of Bray who, by the very nature of his office, must regard anything that looks like a crisis as a personal threat to his efficiency, may, with no evil intentions in his mind, decide upon courses which are not well for the permanent interests of this country? Even a slight blunder on his part—and he must be an extremely busy man—might conceivably lead to serious consequences.'

and so on from the pen of 'A Gentleman with a Duster' and of Harold Begbie, who thus held his friend up to obloquy (or was it perverted flattery?) and who according to his invariable habit when in London, had just dined with him.

Harold Begbie died in October 1929, but I have purposely presented this rechauffe in detail because it also serves to show how, even in 1925, Mr Baldwin was still mystifying the key men of Fleet Street. Possibly it throws light upon his continued distrust of the Press, for he knew this story as I have written it.

From now onwards two major prospective appointments, which would rest with him, were constantly in Mr Baldwin's mind—those of the Archbishop of Canterbury and of the Viceroy of India. On those long country walks at Chequers he would think aloud and approach each of these impending vacancies from every conceivable angle. His concern became so infectious, as week succeeded week, that finally Ronald became conscious of the same anxiety, and the shadow of his master's burden fell upon him also.

There came an interval, however, when the Summer Recess of

¹ *John Bull*, May 30, 1925

Parliament brought some respite Mr and Mrs Baldwin went to Aix-les-Bains as usual, but on the 13th September Ronald joined them again in Paris

M Caillaux, the French Finance Minister, was leaving that week for the U S A to confer on International Finance with Mr Mellon, Head of the American Treasury, and the day before this departure his name was unexpectedly sent up to Mr Baldwin at the Ritz Hotel Mr Baldwin recoiled visibly and firmly declined to receive him until he could be persuaded that the usual preliminary *démarches* would certainly have been made if anything more serious than a courtesy visit were intended

So Ronald went down and was himself somewhat disturbed to find M Caillaux tightly buttoned into his coat with the additional indication of formality in the shape of black suède gloves very much overcome by white starched cuffs They ascended together Bows were exchanged, then a most disconcerting pause At last Caillaux hit upon the remark that Mr Baldwin had been to Washington (incidentally, Caillaux spoke in English) Caillaux then announced that he was going to America (Both these facts were known to all the world) Caillaux then ventured upon a question, 'What did Mr Baldwin think of Mr Mellon'

'M Caillaux,' said Mr Baldwin, 'I will admit you to a profound confidence You will find that even in the United States of America Mr Mellon is a most exceptional host, but in matters of business you will find him a man of iron '

M Caillaux rose with an air of the *ancien régime* He placed his black-gloved hand upon his heart, inclined his slim figure almost imperceptibly and replied

'Mr Baldwin, I give you my word of honour that I shall respect your confidence,' and after several polite gestures he retired and left the room backwards

My reason for relating this incident is that I feel sure M Caillaux would keep his word most scrupulously, and yet I can see no valid cause for suppressing Mr Baldwin's good opinion of Mr Mellon

At home the atmosphere became surcharged again with the problem of the two appointments aforementioned Gradually Mr Baldwin's choice for India took definite shape, a prospective Viceroy materialised in his mind, the tension relaxed, and the

going was easier during those long walks at Chequers. But nothing happened nor was anyone warned or apprised of the fact.

Weeks passed, and Ronald ventured at last to remonstrate with the Prime Minister, who seemed to disregard the passage of time.

'But you cannot ask a man to go to India for five years without giving him all the notice possible, so that he may at least break up his home in England with a modicum of inconvenience, and make all his domestic arrangements, etc., and besides, supposing that for some unexpected cause he asks to be excused?'

Finally the Prime Minister told Ronald to arrange for the Minister of Agriculture to come to Chequers with his wife for the following week-end, 25th October.

Mr Wood seemed a little surprised in the absence of any apparent purpose. Chequers was no more a social centre than it was an alternative workshop, and even the Prime Minister's greatest friends in the Government would rarely be asked to forsake their private pursuits in order to come to Chequers without some indication of the reason. Edward Wood, however, not only possessed the most affectionate regard of everyone, but very specially that of Mr Baldwin, and this casual invitation was therefore less open to question in his case than it might otherwise have been.

Friday evening found the five of them there alone. Mr and Mrs Baldwin, Mr Wood, Lady Dorothy, his wife, and Ronald. No convenient opportunity for the subject of India. Saturday passed, a most enjoyable day, but India was not mentioned. During Sunday morning Ronald hedged on the customary walking exercise, and hoped for the best when Mr Baldwin and Mr Wood went forth together. At lunch time it was obvious that rural attractions had brought them home in a canter, while the Raj of India had never even started.

In the Long Gallery after tea, Mrs Baldwin retired to rest, and Lady Dorothy followed, so Ronald escaped, leaving the two alone at six o'clock. When they emerged to dress for dinner they had to pass his door, so in shirt sleeves he intercepted Mr Baldwin while switching off the lights in the Long Gallery.

'Have you told him?' whispered Ronald.

'No,' said the Prime Minister, like an embarrassed schoolboy, and strode away towards his room. At the sound of the dinner

gong, Ronald looked down from the gallery into the great hall, the ladies were there, and Mr Wood was joining them. Ronald waited for Mr Baldwin.

'You really must tell him to-night,' he was saying as they entered the hall together.

'No,' replied Mr Baldwin abruptly, 'you tell him *now*,' and joined the group before the fire.

They went into the dining-room informally so that Ronald brought up the rear with Edward Wood. Mr Baldwin hurried ahead, but the distance was too short, and when they sat down, a whole volume of understanding passed in a single glance between Mr Baldwin and Ronald. Dinner provided every phase of homely atmosphere, as when an intimate family party meets in the paternal home.

During dinner the Prime Minister was at his best, but when the two ladies left the room he bolted after them.

'What's become of S B?' said Mr Wood presently, and Ronald replied, 'I think he has followed the ladies, shall we go into the Hall?'

He sank into an armchair as Mr Wood planted himself in front of the enormous open fireplace.

'I've something to tell you,' said Ronald as his companion looked down at him with his rather sorrowful, but so understanding expression.

'You don't know why S B particularly wanted you here this week-end, and I am going to tell you he wants you to go to India as Viceroy—.'

At that time Edward Wood was most anxious about the precarious health of his father, Viscount Halifax. There were other domestic considerations, as there would be in anyone's case, which of course jumped immediately to his mind. His own wife, for instance, knew nothing whatever about it. So after a few interjections Ronald continued, 'But I am glad he hasn't told you himself, because there is one thing I can say more easily than he could. It is this. He regards you as the right man for the job, and therefore he wishes you to take it. That goes without saying, but it also happens that you are the last man he wants to lose in his Cabinet. That does not go without saying, so I am venturing to tell you because I know. It follows therefore that, if you feel your-

self influenced by what you believe to be his wishes, you may rest absolutely assured that whether your final decision allows you to go, or keeps you at home, the Prime Minister will be gratified and completely satisfied, both personally and in the interests of the State. So far as he is concerned, and his concern is greater than anyone's, he wants you equally in both places'

No more was said, but Mr Wood took Ronald's arm, and they walked slowly up the broad, shallow steps of the Elizabethan oak staircase.

Subject to the King's approval, the appointment as Viceroy to India of Edward Wood, subsequently Lord Irwin, and now Viscount Halifax, was made. Nor was the matter referred to again by the Prime Minister himself. The reason is that Mr Baldwin was very fond of Mr Edward Wood.

Three days later, on the 29th October, 1925, Ronald received a copy of John Masefield's *Gallipoli*. As a little recollection of our delightful Sunday, Yours ever, E W' To which Ronald returned his thanks for the little souvenir 'of an occasion which will rank with me as one of the more important milestones on the road. I regard it as a great privilege to have been so intimately associated with your last appointment.'

Towards the end of the year the Art Editor of one of our leading dailies wrote to Ronald for the name of his photographer, because he found that 'The only one in our possession is old and faded. I should like to destroy this.' The answer was as follows:

'I am obliged to you, etc. May I assure you however that whenever you have done me the honour to publish an illustration in connection with myself, it has always been the same unflattering likeness, not of me but of a personal friend of mine! And I should indeed regret any discontinuation of this admirable practice!'

'Firstly, to those who know me not (nor my friend) it is presumably a matter of no interest, secondly, to those who know me (or my friend) it affords a source of amusement, and thirdly, to my friend it is satisfactory, I hope, to observe his very unpleasant picture associated with my humble name, while to myself it is of considerable assistance and gives me a moral ascendancy over those of my visitors who may expect to find in me the original of your "old and faded" Private Secretary to the Prime Minister.'

'I trust therefore that you will be tolerant with my feelings and, if it be deemed expedient for the purpose of completing your columns, that you will continue the habit of publishing someone else's photograph over my name, since the convenience which it affords me could only be exceeded by the publication of none at all'

About this time certain conversations occurred between R and a wealthy non-political friend He had no desire to suppress his identity because his mind was firmly set against compensatory reward Anonymity and mystery, he declared, were difficult to reconcile with honesty of purpose The following correspondence was therefore without reserve and explains itself

12th December, 1925

DEAR SIR RONALD,

I have been wondering for some time what the attitude of His Majesty's Government would be if I made a proposal to give £100,000 to form a fund that would go to provide a pension for the retiring Prime Minister, and an allowance for the Prime Minister in office

I feel that this would be the means of allowing a poor man at any time to become Prime Minister of this country, and that, if a man were once Prime Minister, on retiring he would not require to go through the daily toil of work (which often means work day and night) that is his lot if he has no private income He has to keep his position as Leader of the Opposition in the House of Commons, and earn his living at other times

When a poor man is appointed Prime Minister there are many things for which he requires money before he gets his salary, and I consider the present salary quite inadequate for the position

My ideas run on a small trust of three, say the permanent Secretary and Head of the Civil Service for the time being, and I would like to be able to persuade you to be another member, and, if I were acceptable to the other two Trustees, I would be quite willing to accept the third

I should propose that the arrangement be that two-thirds of the interest on this sum would go to form a pension for the last Prime Minister, and the one-third would go to the present Prime Minister, but the Trustees should have power to make arrangements to vary this according to the men who occupied the different positions

These are only preliminary musings, and before saying anything more, I shall be glad to hear from you

The object was twofold Firstly, to establish the financial status of the Prime Minister of the day by means of an annuity during his tenure of office, and thus to adjust the existing difference between his taxed and his untaxed emoluments, and secondly, to secure that on his resignation he should be suitably provided for during his lifetime Both these objects being subject absolutely to the administration and the discretionary power vested in the Trustees

At that time there were still living six Prime Ministers past and present, namely, Rosebery, Balfour, Asquith, Lloyd George, Ramsay MacDonald, and Baldwin It was certain however that only the two actual Leaders of His Majesty's Government and Opposition would be concerned, and that the former, Mr Baldwin, would not become a beneficiary under the scheme

Ronald replied in these terms

'The question now seems to demand an early selection of the principal Trustee, and to this, the primary consideration at this juncture, I have given much thought

'It had occurred to me since our conversation that a certain delicacy might exist in the mind of any permanent official who by the very nature of his office would be brought into close relationship with the Prime Minister past or present, and quite possibly both, and that in such circumstances it would perhaps be expedient to look elsewhere than to the Head of the Civil Service, for the performance of the duties in question

'If this be so, I suggest that the request might be made with advantage to the Controller and Auditor-General He occupies a position akin to that of a Judge, he is not the servant of any administration, though his appointment is of course a permanent one, held at present by Sir Malcolm Ramsay, K C B He is directly responsible to the House of Commons, and is only removable by the joint action of both Houses of Parliament, being in consequence the most independent arbiter available of any principles which come within his sphere

'The advantage accompanying this nomination would be that any critical feeling which might otherwise exist on questions of awards, etc , would be immediately allayed by the fact that so confidential an adviser to Parliament was equally representative of the trust

'If you agree therefore with this reasoning, and will allow me to do so, I could proceed accordingly, approach Sir Malcolm Ramsay, and write you further after consultation with him. Until that moment I feel some diffidence in venturing upon any suggestions in regard to the many points and details which will of course arise on your most munificent proposal.'

The answer and final acknowledgment stated

'I have your further letter, and am very willing to agree to your suggestion about the other Trustee, etc., etc.'

It need scarcely be added that following upon the preliminary conversations and letters relating to this matter, each intermediate step had been taken only after consultation with Sir Warren Fisher, Head of the Civil Service, Mr Baldwin, the Prime Minister, and Sir Malcolm Ramsay, the Controller and Auditor-General.

At the concluding stage, however, Mr Baldwin sought the guidance of Sir Austen Chamberlain, who, he said, deprecated the proposal as 'incompatible with the dignity of His Majesty's Government'. It was accordingly rejected.

But in the end, and of his own motion, Mr Baldwin brought a measure before Parliament to effect the same result, only this time as a charge upon public funds. And, be it said, he excluded himself from any participation in the provisions therein proposed.

Early in 1926 the necessity arose of finding an alternative Foreign Secretary in the absence at Geneva of Sir Austen Chamberlain. On the 21st of March, during one of the long country walks at Chequers, Mr Baldwin made this the principal topic of his spoken thought. He thrashed it out by and large.

To anyone familiar with his masterly defence against intricate ring tactics, the fact would be apparent that complete freedom of action on a generous manoeuvring ground was a first essential for his talents, and to assume the cumbersome harness of the Department himself would seriously hamper his movements. Moreover, Foreign Affairs could scarcely be regarded as offering a field where Mr Baldwin would be at his ease. Nevertheless, Ronald suggested that he might temporarily retain the office in his own hands.

The Prime Minister incontinently waved aside this proposal. 'The dual control,' he said, 'had nearly killed Ramsay Mac-

Donald, and its equivalent had actually proved the undoing of Lloyd George' Ronald attributed the former to the weakness of Mr MacDonald's colleagues on Foreign Affairs, which was the reason he had given himself, and the latter to the strength of Mr Lloyd George's Opposition, but he conceded that in modern times, the task would be impracticable in default of a Deputy Leader of the House of Commons This, said Mr Baldwin, he would never do It was the great mistake that Lloyd George had made, and, reverting to the Foreign Office, he insisted that Neville Chamberlain must remain at the Ministry of Health, it was 'too important to risk anyone else there' He mentioned Lord Eustace Percy, and considered Lord Londonderry The first was too academic and mathematical, the latter too Grand Seigneur for the present times, in view of the perfectly innocent reputation in that sense created by Lord Derby as Ambassador in Paris Ronald then hazarded the name of Sir Douglas Hogg He did so with a certain temerity, because for some months past a close personal friend, the late Lord Lawrence of Kingsgate, had constantly assured him that Sir Douglas Hogg would inevitably become the next Conservative Party Leader, and in due course Prime Minister If that view was well founded, he felt on delicate ground Sir Douglas Hogg, however, became Lord Chancellor, so the prediction passed into limbo

Mr Baldwin was keenly alive to the impossibility in existing conditions of dissociating the responsibility for Foreign Affairs from the Head of the Government, and his own simple British temperament recoiled from such an ordeal It was essential, therefore, to appoint a veteran on whom he could rely, rather than a less-experienced Minister, who would inevitably lean upon him He turned to Lord Balfour

On the 20th March a year ago Lord Curzon had died, and Mr Baldwin had asked Lord Balfour to accept the vacant post of Lord President of the Council He had become, in addition, a kind of consulting political physician in all matters of uncertainty both great and small He had acted before as Foreign Secretary in 1922 during the absence through ill health of Lord Curzon, an interregnum made famous by the Balfour note So, Lord Balfour came to the rescue

The Imperial Conference opened after the General Strike of

1926 had drawn to a close. The Delegates were dispersing, and General Hertzog was returning to South Africa on 21st November.

His Private Secretary and Chief of Staff, Gordon Watson, was a friend of Ronald's. They periodically dined together, and were usually joined immediately afterwards at Claridge's by General Hertzog, who, having appeared and possibly delivered a speech at some official function, always escaped surreptitiously, for he shrank from social dalliance. He was an almost impossible guest to entertain.

The night before his departure, however, General Seely, now Lord Mottistone, had invited him to a very small private dinner. The Prime Minister was to be there, but unfortunately had to excuse himself.

The guests in the order of their sitting at a round table were, on General Seely's right, General Hertzog, Ronald, Lord Reading, Lord Birkenhead, General Seely's son, and Lord Balfour, and the object was, of course, to extend General Hertzog in congenial conversation. During dinner all went well, for the unrivalled host was in his element, but towards the end he excelled himself, and with admirable skill managed to give Lord Birkenhead the stage on his own paramount theme — General Hertzog being a lawyer by profession. Lord Reading refused to play, and contributed nothing during the whole evening, but gradually Lord Balfour, quick to perceive the waning opportunity, allowed himself to be drawn into a fencing match with F. E., that master jurist and outstanding exponent of the forensic art. The subject was, Dutch influence on Roman Law. It lasted from shortly after 9 p.m. until 1.25 a.m. Hertzog waxed enthusiastic, and acted as second alternately to F. E. and then to A. J. B. He said afterwards that it had been the most masterly exposition of learning and historical technique to which he had ever listened. And A. J. B. was not a lawyer.

The tremendous admiration for Balfour entertained by Hertzog because of his Imperial formula for the Commonwealth of the Dominions must have been enhanced. He came to the Imperial Conference admittedly opposed to anything labelled 'Imperial'. But he landed at Cape Town on 13th December an enthusiastic convert and joined his great South African colleagues as an avowed Imperialist.

Some months after my marriage we were lunching at a country house, 6th January, 1929 Mr R B Bennett, leader at that time of the Conservative Opposition in the Canadian Parliament, sat on the right of our hostess, Ronald on her left Mr Bennett was also a lawyer He asked Ronald a leading question Would he have favoured seeking advice from Lord Curzon or from Lord Balfour? And Ronald replied, 'Either, since from the former I would receive a reasoned argument governed by expediency, while the latter would give me a considered view, based upon profound worldly wisdom But the important point is that in effect they would be identical' And he cited as an example their respective criticisms on Mr Baldwin's 1923 General Election Lord Curzon had said it was 'political insanity,' and Lord Balfour that it was 'unhappy folly'

Mr Bennett laughed, and later, when leaving, I heard him confiding to Ronald, 'Don't for a moment think I underestimate the mentality in that old head of yours!'

CHAPTER 31

1926-1927

AT THE BEGINNING OF MAY THE STATE OF INDUSTRIAL UNREST IN the country had resulted in a complete stoppage of the coal industry This arose primarily out of a series of trade disputes between the miners and the owners, but the Government had appointed a Coal Commission, whose proposals were accepted, and had paid a subsidy of twenty-three millions in the hope of bridging the difficulties The Trade Union leaders, however, failed to obtain satisfactory concessions and the General Council of the Trades Union Congress called a General Strike

At midnight on May 3rd, Mr J H Thomas told Mr A J Cook 'the Government has declared war, we must now fight for our lives,' and with the dawn of Tuesday, May 4th, the General Strike broke out in the offices of the *Daily Mail* At a reasonably early hour Ronald telephoned to Windsor Castle for the information of the King He explained the position to Colonel Wigram and described the strike in the *Daily Mail* office which developed into the General Strike

Mr Baldwin said in the House of Commons, 'Everything that I care for most is being smashed to bits' Newspaper printers struck The news service was carried on by Broadcasting and by the publication of the *British Gazette*, a daily official organ produced by amateur effort without profit but 'on the authority and, if necessary, at the expense of the Government' Troops and armoured cars gave London the appearance of military manœuvres To make matters worse, the situation in France was causing grave anxiety, for a breakdown of the Washington Treaty and repudiation of the French debt had both been announced in the Chancellor of the Exchequer's Budget Speech

Downing Street became a centre of activity Mrs Baldwin's fertile brain and large heart were immediately engaged She was haunted by the difficulty of transporting women workers in London to and from their places of business 'My dear,' she said to me, 'we must arrange an emergency service at once Call it "The

Baldwin Emergency Transport Service" So I set about organising it We arranged with Sir John Reith that she should broadcast an appeal for the loan of cars and for volunteer drivers The immediate response exceeded every expectation

Large white cards were printed by the Stationery Office bearing the distinguishing letters in huge black type 'B E T S' for attachment to cars, for identification by the police, and for recognition by the women workers concerned (the original idea naturally occurred simultaneously to sundry mountebanks that this sign could be vastly improved by erasing the lower parabola of the initial letter!)

The working machinery was transferred to an office acquired and equipped for the purpose in Berkeley Square The Square itself was segregated by Scotland Yard for the exclusive use and parking of B E T S cars By Saturday, the 8th, 500 cars were at work, and 900 indexed

On the afternoon of the 5th a T U C plan to cripple and dislocate the municipal light and power system was discovered Orders were issued by the Trades Union Leaders to paralyse and break down the supply of food and the necessities of life Arrangements were made to extend the number of Special Constables in London to 50,000, and a convoy of 1st Battalion Coldstream Guards in 110 lorries proceeded, under police escort, to the East India Docks in order to convoy all foodstuffs back to London M Parmentier flew from Paris to see the Governor of the Bank He announced the bankruptcy of the French Exchequer He endeavoured to borrow British gold, but failed and flew back The French Chamber was to be summoned for the 24th, but all knowledge of this intention was studiously suppressed in order to avoid revolution in France and in England At 9 30 p m the Prime Minister steadied the country by broadcast

Sunday the 9th was a quiet day Mr Baldwin walked on Hampstead Heath in the morning with his son Windham and Tom Jones, while Ronald saw the Prince of Wales at York House In the afternoon Mr Baldwin went to the Zoo, and at 7 p m he visited the *Morning Post* office to watch the printing of the *British Gazette*

Consideration was given to the possible introduction of legislation designed to adjust the power of Trades Unions to make

sympathetic strikes illegal, and so to prevent any recurrence of the present situation

But grave concern was felt as to the wisdom of this measure, and thereafter the matter was postponed. The danger was deferred and perhaps by this very circumstance an even greater danger was averted.



With the Summer Recess of Parliament came an active period of preparation for Mr Baldwin's Second Imperial Conference. During his mission to England on the latter occasion Mr Mackenzie King invited both the Prime Minister and the Prince of Wales to visit Canada together the following summer for the Diamond Jubilee of Canadian Confederation.

By this time a mutual feeling of regard and close personal friendship had developed between the Prince and Mr Baldwin, and they decided almost at once that, subject to the King's approval, each would go if the other did. In due course, therefore, replies were sent through official channels to the Dominion Government of Canada accepting the invitation on behalf of the Prince of Wales and of Mr Baldwin. The announcement was thus made known to the world that they would visit Canada together.

At this stage a curious example occurred of the unexpected methods by which time-honoured official procedure may be influenced or varied.

To those who regularly attended the Lord Mayor's Guildhall Banquet on the 9th of November, it was a constant cause of distress that among the best speeches of the evening that of the Lord Chief Justice of England was regularly guillotined because it figured so late on the Toast list, and this was largely due to the fact that replies to the Combatant Forces of the Crown were delivered according to custom by the representative Heads of each of the three fighting Services.

The City Remembrancer of that time, Colonel Stuart Sankey, was an Old Marlburian, so in addition to the official tie between them, he and Ronald cherished a personal link. They deplored this misfortune together, and became communicative about the length and number of unavoidable speeches.

'Why don't you do something about it?' asked Ronald

'How can we?' was the reply 'You, from Whitehall, are our guests, and it would be unbecoming in us to offer suggestions'

'And you, of the City, are our Hosts, so it ill behoves us to offer any criticism of your accepted procedure'

But both of them were in complete agreement, so it was arranged that if Sankey would sound the Lord Mayor privately, and assure Ronald that he was favourably disposed towards economy of time and effort, Ronald would discover that the Prime Minister and the respective Secretaries of State, including the First Lord of the Admiralty, would welcome a reply to the Toast of the Combatant Forces of the Crown, by a single speech annually from the head of one or other of the Services in rotation

From the year 1926 therefore this has been the practice, and the eloquence of the Law can now be heard upon that auspicious occasion to the advantage of everyone, who nevertheless remains unaware of the inspiration which caused two speeches to be held in abeyance, while the mirth of the evening enjoys stimulation by so brilliant an after-dinner speaker as, for example, Lord Hewart of Bury

Meanwhile Their Royal Highnesses the Duke and Duchess of York were due to leave England early in January to represent the King at the inaugural ceremony in Australia of the new seat of Government at Canberra. Their return was timed for the end of June and would therefore release the Prince of Wales, whose date of departure for Canada was determined — since he was accompanying Mr Baldwin — by the closing Session of Parliament. But while the detailed arrangements and staff work in preparation for these Empire tours were exacting close and laborious attention, they were governed from the outset by financial considerations, and at that moment Parliament was in no mood to be lavish with the taxpayers' money

Nevertheless, on 6th January, H M S *Renown* sailed for Australia with the Duke and Duchess of York. So according to established custom, inspired by the Duke himself, Ronald wrote to him regularly as he had done for years. These letters in sequence form a comprehensive serial of current events, but the particular concerns of Parliament on its reassembling shortly after his departure were of special interest to the Duke, and I therefore quote Ronald's letter of that date in its entirety

1926-1927

10 DOWNING STREET,

WHITEHALL

8th February, 1927

MY DEAR PRINCE ALBERT,

The new Parliamentary Session commenced to-day and its opening was at once marked by the introduction of Oswald Mosley, the new Member for Smethwick, and the change over of Wedgwood Benn, who took his seat for the first time on the Labour side. Together they afford a strong reinforcement to Labour, the former being a more valuable candidate probably than he is popular as an individual, and the latter being admittedly one of the ablest parliamentary tacticians in the House, which fact will help to remedy a major defect in the Labour Party.

The moving of the Address fell to Oliver Stanley, who made one of the best speeches in this connection of recent years. He dealt with Home Affairs, and was, therefore, faced with the extremely difficult problem of Trade Unions, which he managed with consummate skill, devoid of platitudinous boredom and guiltless of controversial excursions — a really great performance.

The Seconder was Major MacAndrew, Member for Kilmarnock, who spoke almost entirely on China, a scarcely less hazardous task — and one of which he also acquitted himself with great tact and ability.

Mr Ramsay MacDonald then made a very characteristic speech of considerable length and studied moderation. It was clear that he was reluctant to say a word which could conflict with the National interests or the policy of the Government, with which he is probably in individual agreement, and the Prime Minister replied with a beautifully balanced speech during which the Prince of Wales took his seat in the Gallery.

This concluded the first day, but as the next mail to you is scheduled for the 24th instant, I will briefly jot down points of seeming interest in regard to the proceedings, which may keep you in touch during the few leisureed intervals which intersect your very full programme.

17th February

Since writing the foregoing, I have been laid up again with an aftermath of the previous cause, but the Debate in Parliament of the British Policy in China provided no feature of special interest beyond disclosing a categorical affirmation by

all Parties of the Government's attitude which was regarded as unchallengeable

On the Amendment to the Trade Union Legislation, the Labour Party presented a somewhat illusory appearance of unanimity at the expense of their claim to political wisdom Mr Clynes was compelled to admit that the General Strike of last year was crude and foolish, although fine and altruistic, and expressed the pious hope that it would not be repeated

Sir John Simon, who followed, contributed one of the finest examples of his oratorical gifts As a rule both he and his Party colleagues indulge, during the present Parliament, in a display of the light fantastic toe on the top wire of the fence, on this occasion, however, Sir John descended from his customary poise and gave a remarkable display of mental acrobatics upon very solid ground He took a most vigorous line against the Socialist Amendment, he built up his case with the skill of an advocate by slow degrees and with devastating logic, he faced his own friends, and reached the climax of his speech with the question 'Do the Trade Unions repudiate the instrument of the General Strike or do they not?' If the former, then legislation might be unnecessary, if the latter, it was the bounden duty of Parliament to take steps to maintain its authority against so unconstitutional a weapon An unanswerable postulate

So far as concerns the proceedings in the House of Commons, the above features of the respective measures are probably the most pronounced and sufficient for the interest of Your Royal Highness up to date

The Business of the Session has been so arranged as to allow Parliament to rise during the first week in August — omitting for this purpose the Poor Law Reform Bill and the Factories Bill The New Session is timed to commence in November, thus avoiding an Autumn Session and providing time incidentally for the proposed trip to Canada mentioned in my last letter

I ought perhaps to remind you, since so long a period will elapse before your eye scans these lines, that the foregoing observations upon discussions in the House arise only upon the Debate on the Address, the actual Measures under consideration will, of course, form the subject of subsequent Debate

18th February

I attach for your convenience extracts from Hansard of last night on the Motion to grant £7,000 in connection with your mission, which comes under the Civil Service Supplementary

Estimate 1926-27 I do so firstly, because you will like to see a verbatim report, which may not reach you by other channels, and secondly, because it affords me an opportunity of reassuring you, in case any garbled, or biased, version should come to your knowledge.

You must not forget that the quiet repose of the Labour Party is more often than not rudely disturbed by the boisterous ecstasy of some of its offspring bursting into shrieks or subsiding into paroxysms, as offensive respectively to their more sedate leaders as to the unwilling witnesses in the neighbouring tenements.

The result speaks for itself without further comment from me. The Vote was agreed to without a division, and the House was enabled to bestow upon Your Royal Highness a message of loyalty and good wishes.

To turn from a disagreeable sound, although an innocuous spectacle, to more salubrious considerations, last night Sam Hoare and his wife returned to London from India after another epoch-making flight heralding additional laurels for the escutcheon of Civil Aviation.

They left Croydon on the 27th December in one of the 'Hercules' aircraft with which the Cairo-Bagdad-Basra service is operated, and flew, in all, about 12,500 miles with clocklike regularity from start to finish and without mishap. Lady Maud is the first woman to accomplish a long-distance voyage of this kind by air, and the King has accordingly approved her appointment to be a D B E.

The chief feature of commercial interest in respect of this flight is that a large saving of time was effected, and yet the cost was practically the same as it would have been by sea, while the entire programme and time-table were carried out with mechanical punctuality.

19th February

Yesterday a lighter vein was contributed to the routine of the House of Commons by Mr Mitchell Banks speaking in support of a Bill framed to prohibit the invitation or use of funds from Foreign sources for the furtherance or maintenance of Industrial disputes.

Mitchell Banks has, I believe, schooled himself as to style and delivery of speech on the model of 'F. E.'¹ and is always

¹ The late Lord Birkenhead

extremely clever in the presentation of his case and not infrequently amusing

In referring to the Labour Party and their blind opposition to any proposal which might even indirectly touch Trade Unions, he described them in the words of the old song

‘To teach our flock we never missed,
We are by God appointed,
And damned are all who do resist
Or touch the Lord’s anointed’

And again in sketching the attitude of Sir Austen Chamberlain towards the Russian Government, he recalled the quotation from ‘Alice Through the Looking Glass’

‘He was so very stiff and proud,
He said, “You need not shout so loud”,
And he was very proud and stiff,
He said, “I’ll go and wake them, if——”’

I need hardly add that these passages which adorned an able and attractive debate were greeted with unmixed amusement and approval

22nd February

On re-perusing the foregoing, I fear that I may have wearied you with prosiness, but my purpose was to give you impressions which would only have reached you in some other form or perhaps not at all

CHAPTER 32

1927

ON 7TH APRIL, MR BALDWIN ATTENDED A DINNER AT THE ROYAL College of Surgeons, at the pressing invitation of Sir Berkeley Moynihan As an after-dinner digestive, the guests were given the free run of the College Museum, which to the lay mind contains a collection of scientific horrors

Mr Baldwin has never been himself under this kind of ordeal, and the result of his perambulation is described in a letter written by Ronald to Lord Stamfordham on the following day

'Last night the Prime Minister and Mrs Baldwin were dining with the President of the Royal College of Surgeons on the occasion of the Lister Centenary Celebrations It was almost a private dinner, with little ceremony, and no speeches All went very well indeed until the Prime Minister was just about to leave, when he practically fainted

'Sir Berkeley Moynihan and Lord Dawson kept him back in a room separated from the other guests without its being noticed About twenty minutes afterwards, everyone having left, we got him back here without incident Lord Dawson followed the car and waited with me while Mr Baldwin was being put to bed, and then went up to see him He told me that there was obviously nothing seriously wrong, but that he would come back in the morning at ten o'clock, and make a more comprehensive examination We left together about midnight

'This morning Lord Dawson overhauled the P M thoroughly, and told me as follows If he were a non-public man it would be a case of going to bed for a week, and abroad for a month This being impossible, a middle course must be adopted The P M must go to Chequers at once and rest in bed There was no cause for anxiety however, as, organically, all was well It was merely a case of the heart of a very tired man going on strike, and therefore every available moment must be put to advantage, in order to have him back here on Monday for the Budget without arousing rumours To this end I was to communicate at once with you, and, using Lord Dawson's name,

ask His Majesty to excuse the P M 's arrival at Windsor this afternoon Lord Dawson will be at Chequers to-morrow, and will then report further

'By this time it was past mid-day and as I failed to get you at once I left that duty to my colleagues, while I sought out the Chief Whip at the House

'So far there has been no leakage whatever, because the knowledge has been confined to so few people, but I hasten to send you this explanation although you may already have been in communication with Lord Dawson

'Most fortunate it was, firstly, that we were in that particular company, and secondly, that to-day being Friday, he can be got away without attracting attention, and with a free week-end ahead We are taking every precaution to keep the whole story unknown '

Every possible engagement for the immediate future was cancelled, and a relief was afforded which contributed both time and opportunity for the collection of data for the enormous number of speeches which Mr Baldwin would be called upon to deliver during his visit to Canada

In July the Prince of Wales and the Prime Minister of England sailed in the S S *Empress of Australia* to be present at the Diamond Jubilee celebrations of the Dominion and, writing to me during the voyage, Ronald found time to answer more fully the question I had repeatedly asked him of late, namely, why the Prime Minister was apparently so misunderstood in certain quarters, and how it came that such divergent views were constantly expressed about him in the Press? He wrote as follows

'Mr Baldwin will I believe be regarded by historians as the greatest interpreter of the English character ever discovered

'If some really analytical mind had traced the metaphysical cause and effect of his many transformations — as J Maynard Keynes might do in the case of some deep economic problem buried in the profundities of human existence — then Mr Baldwin's claim to be "a simple man" might be elucidated

'According to the diversity of his critics he appears to be a mystery man, for while some anathematise him as a political contortionist, others eulogise him as a miracle But both these superlatives are wrong, and two factors stand out pre-eminently, his simplicity and his belief in himself The latter is the outcome

of the former, and his Platonic honesty as to both has been completely transparent from the beginning

'The fact that this view is tacitly accepted constitutes the earliest lesson which he presents about the British character, and when he began to tell people that he was an honest man they believed him, not because he said so, but because they thought it was true

'At a single bound therefore he had negotiated the first few rungs on the ladder of popular esteem, and completed the first self-taught lesson about himself, but it took him a long time to appreciate the capital value of this because of his simplicity

'He slipped badly time after time, but he changed front and recovered His reorientations were absolutely honest, and it was this honesty which captured people's confidence, while the *volte face* left them bewildered but undismayed After all, the good God sends us rain one day and sunshine the next without being considered inconsistent or dishonest! — and Mr Baldwin explained his reasons, but, excellent as these invariably were, they shrank to insignificance beside the assurance that he could be trusted [Two years later Mr Baldwin sanctioned the Election slogan, "Trust me "]

'Nor was it because the average Englishman — while enjoying the franchise — knows little about politics, but rather because he knows almost as little about himself, that he accepted the artist's character study of what he really is Mr Baldwin painted a true picture showing his belief in the common sense of his countrymen, he said so with his gifted eloquence and with absolute conviction Mr Baldwin was a simple Englishman, what wonder then that other simple Englishmen who asked only to be led, what wonder that they should follow him?

'That was the second lesson which he taught himself, the second exposé of the English character, and the middle rung of his own escalading ladder

'Then came the third and last movement The development of his experience in mass psychology now inspired him to adopt the most sensitive timbre, and to stress his dominant phrase upon the three most delicate strings of the human instrument, Simplicity, Directness (Honesty), and Emotion His modulation was bewitching, his measure exact, and his orchestration perfect

'In accordance with the law of contrasts the Englishman loves simplicity because he is himself perhaps the most complicated

product of the human race He derives from the staunchest survivals of innumerable importations, and is therefore the best bred mongrel in the world He thrives upon honesty, directness or straightforwardness, firstly because it pays, and secondly because he is inherently too lazy to appreciate the value of finesse, while emotion, being one of his most cherished concomitants collectively, is studiously suppressed by him individually

'The Englishman is therefore an absolute paradox Mr Baldwin calls himself a typical Englishman, therefore he must be a complete enigma But he has diagnosed the peculiar characteristics of his countrymen, and can play upon those symptoms which they themselves cannot define, and the diagnosis of which he never divulges, so he has become oracular

'Thus Mr Baldwin has climbed to the top of the ladder and stormed the breach behind which the true English character still modestly strives to hide itself

'The three stages of British psychology which Mr Baldwin's achievement brings to light are therefore as follows

- '1 The independent quality of an Englishman subconsciously denies the superiority of anyone, ergo, he cherishes the esoteric belief that his leader is in reality as simple a man as himself
- '2 The mutual acceptance of this personal resemblance produces an immediate affinity (positive) and disposes of initial divergence (negative), ergo, he will, then, accept his leader's dictum "on the nod "
- '3 Without questioning the why and wherefore the average Englishman will finally follow his leader blindfold, ergo, he can now be led where previously he could not even be driven

'It is on this basis of psychiatry that a Cavalry subaltern successfully leads his troop into action And yet (a final paradox) Mr Baldwin would not have made a good cavalry subaltern '

The foregoing analysis appears to be corroborated by an episode which had occurred two years previously In October, 1925, Ronald was staying at Hackwood, one of Lord Curzon's houses, and Viscount Castlerosse, a fellow guest, asked him for a comparison between Mr Baldwin and Mr Ramsay MacDonald So — subject to privilege and confidence which have been scrupu-

lously observed — Ronald, who was then private secretary to the former, and had previously occupied the same position with the latter, told him this story

Within a few days of Mr MacDonald becoming the first Socialist Prime Minister, Lady Cunard drew Ronald into her privy councils, as she was generously wont to do with her official friends, and cross-examined him about his new and, in her milieu, unknown master ‘But, Ronald dear,’ said she, ‘has he any table manners? is he an *educated* man?’

Ronald was so tickled that he re-enacted the scene for the benefit of Mr MacDonald, who laughed immoderately. His generous sense of humour came into play at once, but his dignified Scottish reserve effectually cried ‘Halt’ to any repetition of so personal a tale, and it is probable that *he* never confided it to anyone.

With such evidence Ronald took an early opportunity of assuring Mr Baldwin that the highest office was obviously insufficient in itself to satisfy the fastidious taste of Mayfair. His reasoning, however, was soon falsified by the fact that Lady Cunard almost immediately acquired the friendship of Mr Baldwin and succumbed to the charm of Mr MacDonald.

Mr Baldwin’s reaction to this story differed somewhat from that of Mr MacDonald, until inspired by himself, it filtered into the open with application to himself, but with the bit about table manners suppressed. Then he also rejoiced exceedingly.

The alternative rendering has apparently been accepted without any sign of displeasure from him. Nor has the true story been known until now beyond those individuals above mentioned. It would seem that the caricature caused amusement to Mr MacDonald so long as it could be veiled, and no less to Mr Baldwin so long as it stood revealed. The former had not yet publicly emerged from obscurity, while the latter had already graced the Premiership.

This was the answer to Lord Castlerosse, and in the circumstances everyone concerned has allowed the unhallowed version to lie undisturbed.

This fact appears to support both Mr Baldwin’s contention that he relies upon the common sense of public opinion, and Ronald’s claim supporting the blind confidence of the public in



IN CANADA 1927

Seated Ronald Windham Baldwin The Prime Minister H.R.H. The Prince of Wales Baldwin H.R.H. Prince George,
Mr C. E. G. Munro Mr Beatty Captain C. Gordon Munro Admiral Sir Lionel Halcy

Mr Baldwin (or anything about him which he seems to endorse), for the story as applied to Mr Baldwin was manifestly absurd

The *Empress of Australia* arrived at Quebec on the 30th July At the official reception the heat was terrific and nearly overwhelmed Mr Baldwin On the next day they embarked on the S S *St Lawrence* for Montreal, which they reached that night Then they returned to the train

Two days later they arrived at Ottawa, where various ceremonies were to take place

This royal train which constituted their headquarters for nearly three weeks, was in itself sufficiently remarkable to attract crowds at each wayside crossing or prairie station Its composition established a standard of hotel de luxe on wheels unknown previously, and presented a unique collection of State cars It was probably the most luxurious train ever coupled Mr and Mrs Baldwin were in 'Wentworth,' and Ronald's quarters in 'Killarney' comprised a sleeping-compartment, bathroom, study, dining-room, and kitchen with its own chef and servants There were no less than fifteen of such cars

Guests on this train were asked at the outset to indicate their particular choice in wine, cigars, or victuals, and encouraged to give personal lunch or dinner parties in their own private compartments As a mere formality, presumably, they were presented with a railway ticket in gold for the senior members, and silver gilt for the others Upon such a tablet Ronald's full name was engraved below the enamelled arms of the C P R , while the inscription begs to tender to him 'the courtesies of the railway on the occasion of his visit to Canada in the year 1927 ' This gold talisman enclosed in a tooled leather case is evidence of the grand manner in which Canada received her guests, but as if to extend such hospitality to its extremity, Ronald received the following note

I am informed that no alcoholic beverages are served in Government House, Winnipeg, the Lieutenant-Governor being a conscientious objector in the matter of alcohol I would therefore suggest that if any members of your party desire to go to the dinner to-night in a condition of dignified insobriety, they should make a raid on their own supplies before leaving.

E W BEATTY

In anticipation of ceremonial occasions most of Mr Baldwin's addresses had been prepared beforehand. He arrived in Canada with a collection of over forty, but for the 3rd of August — incidentally his birthday — a very exceptional item on the programme had produced three separate draft speeches, one of which, by Rudyard Kipling, was unquestionably the star turn. In respect of his birthday Mr Baldwin had said on the previous day, 'Had I reflected when first studying the programme arranged for me in Canada, I might have known that he [Mr Mackenzie King] had been aware of the fact, and had decided to provide me with as happy a day as he could on that occasion, for he has arranged — and I have no doubt that he did so to give me pleasure — that I should make three speeches, and be taken to a Poultry Show for a treat.'

At 3 p.m. the Prince of Wales was to perform the dedication ceremony of the Altar in the Peace Tower Chamber of Parliament Buildings. Half an hour previously at the Château Laurier, Mr Baldwin had delivered a major speech of some four thousand words on industrial conditions in England. The present occasion was a particularly solemn one. Some seventy people had been officially expected, but owing to the limited space only thirty or forty persons could be crowded into the small Memorial Chamber. Enshrined within its walls was the Altar upon which lay the Book of Remembrance containing the names of 60,000 Canadians sacrificed in the Great War.

The Prince of Wales removed a Union Jack covering this book and pronounced these words:

'In the name of the people of Canada I set apart the Altar of this Chamber to receive and to hold forever the Book of Remembrance to the glory of those whose names are written therein that they may live for all generations.'

The bugles outside sounded the 'Last Post'. The flag on the Peace Tower was dipped, and there was an interval of silence.

Then came the speech for which Rudyard Kipling's version was a masterpiece equal to his own loftiest level. But Mr Baldwin did not use it. He discarded every sentence prepared for him with thoughtful and anxious care. Without effort, but with obvious inspiration, he spoke only three paragraphs, thus

'There were words spoken on this earth more than two thousand years ago which have often been with me in the days of the War and since When Socrates was sentenced to death he said to his judges "And now we go our ways, I to die and you to live, but which is the better God alone knows" And God alone does know

'For four years the cream of our generation streamed to France and Flanders and Gallipoli from all corners of the earth, and when they passed along they said to us who were left behind "And so we go our ways, we to die, and you to live, but which is the better God alone knows" That secret will not be revealed until the time comes when we shall have all passed away

'Has the sacrifice been made in vain? That question has often been asked, we alone, who survive, can give the answer The happiest moment for us will be when we have so conducted ourselves in this world that we have made that sacrifice worth while and an answer to that question is found Then, when the day comes that we pass on, those we meet, whom we loved best on earth, will say to us, "Our sacrifice, after all, was not in vain",'

These words were rendered semi-dramatically with Mr Baldwin's characteristic spell-binding and emotional appeal His delivery was timed to perfection, his voice exquisitely modulated, and his emphasis beautifully controlled

Immediately afterwards Ronald drove away with him alone His hand was on the Prime Minister's knee, 'That was the most moving spectacle,' he said, 'that I have ever witnessed, and the finest speech I have ever heard you make It was a gem, a perfect cameo, but there will be no record of it There were no reporters present I am going to commit it to paper at once, so will you promise me to think of nothing else until you have checked and corrected my script?'

And Mr Baldwin beamed with pleasure That captivating smile of his belied his words 'It wasn't the tremor in the voice, was it, that impressed you? That, of course, was only put on for effect' Which would seem to vindicate the author of his horoscope, who wrote, 'He would make a great actor,' and as such, his loss to the dramatic stage is perhaps irremediable

Ronald wrote down the speech from memory and Mr Baldwin

checked it at once before attending the unveiling by the Prince of Wales at 3.30 of a statue on Parliament Hill of Sir Wilfred Laurier, followed in its turn by a very exacting visit to the World's Poultry Congress.

That night there was a State Dinner at Government House, but meanwhile a difficult situation had arisen in connection with two motor-cars *de luxe*. Before leaving London a well-known trans-atlantic firm had announced that two specially constructed cars would be placed at the disposal of the Prince of Wales and the Prime Minister respectively for use during the Canadian visit, and for their acceptance afterwards. The commercial advertisement thus obtained would naturally have been enormously productive, but apart from the dignity of the proposed recipients, the question of favouritism arose to the possible disadvantage of the trade generally, and so far as concerned Mr Baldwin, the respect due to a recognised practice imposed upon servants of His Majesty's Government as expressed, for example, in *Office Notice* 176, of his own former Department, the Board of Trade:

'It is highly improper for any member of the Staff to accept any gratuity or present of any kind from any person who has become known to such member through, or in connection with, official duties, this prohibition extends to the acceptance of hospitality. The Board of Trade has laid down that breach of this rule would be viewed with severe disapproval entailing liability to instant dismissal.'

Suitable replies had accordingly been sent, both by Sir Godfrey Thomas for the Prince of Wales, and by Ronald writing on behalf of the Prime Minister, explaining that as guests of the Dominion Government it would not be incumbent upon them to suggest or make provision for personal transport, and the matter apparently ended. On the morning of his birthday, however, a statement appeared in the Canadian Press reviving the embarrassment and declaring that,

'The car in which Lady Baldwin [*sic*] drove to Parliament Hill yesterday has been presented to Premier Baldwin as a fine example of craftsmanship. The second car of the same type, although of somewhat varied colour, has been purchased by the Prince of Wales for this Tour. Both cars will make the

entire tour with the Royal party, and will be used everywhere the Prince and Premier Baldwin go. It is understood that Premier Baldwin will take his car back to England' (*Ottawa Journal*, 3rd August, 1927)

These statements in so far as they concerned Mr Baldwin were entirely fictitious, and to make matters even more difficult Mrs Baldwin was particularly enamoured of the beautiful luxurious deep-cream-coloured car thus seductively credited to her husband. It was a delicate predicament. Ronald closeted himse'f with Lord Willingdon and, producing the cutting, told him the whole story.

He suggested the importance of contradicting the report in London before it could be repeated and gain credence in the English Press. Lord Willingdon immediately sent for his Secretary, Eric Mieville, and instructed him to regularise the matter locally, and to so inform the Dominions Office at home. But Mrs Baldwin was puzzled, and, I believe, has never understood Ronald's unaccountable determination to 'do the Prime Minister out of a motor-car.'

After visiting the Thousand Islands in the St Lawrence River on board Mr Fulfor's yacht, they rejoined the private train and went on to Toronto, where a garden party was given at Government House. But the following day they were to motor to Niagara Falls and take part at Fort Erie in the dedication and International 'Peace' Bridge Thanksgiving ceremony.

It occurred to Ronald that as they were in the Conservative Province of Ontario, Mr Baldwin might extend a compliment to its Premier, Mr Howard Ferguson, by making the journey to Niagara Falls with him alone, independently of the members of the Liberal Dominion Government. He consulted Colonel Ralston, who immediately drove him to Mr Ferguson's house, and the proposal was readily endorsed.

So Ronald was handed over to one of Mr Ferguson's colleagues in the Ontario Ministry, who bundled him into his own car, which then remained stationary at the tail of a queue about two miles long! Ronald hailed a constable, and explained the status of his Ministerial companion, but with no result. Then he proclaimed his own importance, and the urgency of his mission. He produced an overriding Blue Pass, giving the holder unhindered passage throughout Canada. The constable seemed nonplussed, and said

the problem was one for his Inspector Where was his Inspector? Standing over there Would the constable kindly show the Inspector that pass? Then with considerable concern, Ronald watched the Inspector's face Suddenly it relaxed astonishingly, he left the constable without a word, and hurried across to the car 'Are you Colonel Waterhouse?' he muttered, scrutinising Ronald almost rudely, and before waiting for an answer, he climbed on to the running-board, ordered the chauffeur out of the queue, and instructed him to drive to Government House with all speed on the wrong side of the road Arrived there, Ronald thanked him and explained that he would be out again in about seven minutes Could the car be kept handy for immediate use? 'Don't you worry,' said the Inspector, 'you will find me standing here'

Ronald hurried through Government House out into the garden, and found the two Princes receiving several thousand guests Some distance away Mr Baldwin with Mr Mackenzie King were doing likewise He came up behind them, and warned Mr Baldwin that arrangements for him personally were being varied — the while he shook hands with one after another of the guests filing past

When he had extricated himself, he found his Inspector waiting outside the great porch The car was standing alone in the middle of the drive The Inspector immediately opened the door 'To Casa Loma,' said Ronald 'And would you mind getting in here beside me? Now,' he continued, 'tell me why that pass inspired you to help me, even to the extent of coming with me yourself?'

'Why, Sir,' was the reply, 'I have followed your career ever since you left the Carabiniers in Bangalore I was Sergeant-Major Huxtable of "A" Squadron, and I helped to see you into the ambulance the day you rode "Flight" and beat Mr Anketell-Jones's "Lady Abbess"'

It was a memorable trip to the Niagara Falls Mr and Mrs Baldwin, Mr Howard Ferguson and Ronald crossed Lake Ontario to Queenstown in complete comfort on board the S S *Cayuga*, while the remainder of the party accompanying the two Princes went by road from Toronto via Hamilton, one of the principal thoroughfares of Canada, which was kept absolutely clear of traffic the whole way for 111 miles Thousands of cars, and crowds

on foot along the route were parked off the road, as the procession of thirty-seven cars proceeded without a single check at an average speed of 40 miles per hour, and with perfect precision at allotted intervening distances. The unbroken double line of cheering, and continual dust for nearly three hours proved a very exacting experience, even for the inexhaustible Prince of Wales. And the round journey from Toronto, and back across the Lake, totalled some 204 miles.

Arrangements had been made for the British Ambassador at Washington, Sir Esme Howard, to meet Mr Baldwin and join the luncheon at Victoria Park Restaurant. So Ronald, thinking to profit by the fact that his quartet had arrived well in advance of the main body, asked Mr Ferguson's permission to order lunch at once for these two alone, and suggested joining Mr Ferguson himself at a separate table. The proprietor, however, proved obdurate. He said he could not possibly serve luncheon for *anyone* before the arrival of the Prince of Wales. He would take orders from nobody but Sir Lionel Halsey. Mr Ferguson, the Premier of the Province, tried to convince him, but failed, so finally Ronald threatened him with the Prince's displeasure, and succeeded in luching with Mr Ferguson while Mr Baldwin conversed at another table with Sir Esme Howard.

The protocol for the Peace Bridge ceremony provided for a change of garments here after a long dusty drive in open cars, and rooms had been allotted for the purpose, so after lunch Mr Ferguson said to Ronald, 'Now let us go to my room. Where is Grant?'¹ Ronald discovered that he had not arrived. 'Then,' said the Premier of Ontario, 'will you ask him for my Burberry as soon as he comes?'

The urgent necessity for this was not immediately apparent, but it shortly became so. The Prince arrived rather dazed and dusty, and Ronald made his explanation at once, and received absolution about Mr Baldwin's advance luncheon. Then he sought out Mr Grant, who immediately rushed off carrying the dust-coat to the room of his master. A moment later Ronald was himself being lustily summoned by name, so he hastened to follow.

¹ Mr George Grant, Private Secretary to the Prime Minister of Ontario, with whom he subsequently came to England when Mr Ferguson was appointed High Commissioner for Canada in London.

Mr Ferguson locked the door

'This is a dry country,' he remarked. And being a Conservative Premier, he produced a bottle of whisky from each pocket of his *surtout en-tout-cas*, and with the help of the toilet-table tumbler, he and Ronald profited thereby.

That night, after the dedication service of the now famous Bridge, the Royal train left Toronto for the Western Provinces.

CHAPTER 33

1927-1928

AT CALGARY THE TWO PARTIES SEPARATED THE PRINCE OF WALES left with Prince George for his E P Ranch, while Mr Baldwin's party continued their journey to Banff From there they motored into the Rockies, to Lake Louise, Emerald Lake, and down the Kicking Horse Pass to Field in British Columbia Here Ronald drove out into the Buffalo Reserve with Colonel Coghill, an officer attached to the suite Not long ago these herds of buffalo could be numbered in hundreds of thousands, but the mountainous wooded country was now absorbed by ranches, and the surviving game is preserved under Government supervision in well-defined reserves The Tribe of Stoney Indians indigenous to this large area had equally almost died out Hunters and traders a generation ago, they had now become poor and indolent They too are supervised by Government, but are allowed to leave their controlled districts on licence to peddle their wares and modern produce, curiosities reminiscent of more dramatic days

On a rocky spur in the distance, Ronald saw a solitary Indian tepee with smoke rising from the top It was a picturesque encampment of one of these pedlars out on permit They drove up to see him His tepee, or wigwam, was painted with animals and hunting scenes, as was also the inner canvas lining which directs the smoke from the fire in the middle of the floor His family were huddled around in gaily coloured blankets, while he was putting the final touches to a war-bonnet for sale There were beaded bags, belts, and papoose costumes, all hanging around as their stock-in-trade He spoke English quite well, and wore buckskin shaps He was very reserved, but told Coghill that he was not a Chief, and hoped to do trade at the Banff Springs Hotel So Coghill mentioned that the Prime Minister of England was there, and might possibly become a Chief of his tribe

The next morning a Rodeo was staged Mr and Mrs Baldwin both remained in their apartments to rest, and, under promise to resist intrusion by any unauthorised person, they were left alone

But when returning from the broncho-busting show, the staff were amazed to find a group of nine persons being photographed at the entrance to the hotel. They were Mr Baldwin wearing the delectable war-bonnet (still for sale), the pedlar on his right, Mrs Baldwin on his left, and six of the Indian family *en suite*.

'We are glad to meet you in our country,' the Indian was interpreted as having said, adding that his name was Om Biska Yo-Danga, and that he could speak no English. 'We hope that you will like it, we wish to confer on you the honour of being Chief of our Tribe. I ask you to accept the courtesy of becoming Blood Brother, and of assuming my own name of Chief Sitting Eagle.' And Mr Baldwin had replied, 'I am very pleased to accept this honour.'

Then the taciturn pedlar retired with his war-bonnet, his squaw, and his family, having disposed of nothing but a name, while Mr Baldwin returned with his wife to their interrupted siesta in the satisfactory possession of a second-hand designation. And each of them remained blissfully unaware of the consternation felt by his staff, or of the official wires making priority contact with the Indian Department at Ottawa, in order to regularise a title for the new White Chief. Thus on August the 12th Mr Baldwin received this coveted mark of favour.

Later in the year a series of unsurveyed peaks in the Rocky Mountains were officially named 'The Premier Group.' They include 'Mount Sir Wilfred Laurier,' 11,750 feet, 'Mount Sir John Thompson' and 'Mount Sir John Abbot,' 11,250 feet, 'Mount Sir Mackenzie Bowell,' 11,000 feet, and a little below these altitudes, 'Mount Stanley Baldwin.' So the title of Sitting Eagle would seem to have been appropriate.

There were now only six remaining days in which to complete the Canadian programme. Mr Baldwin's party left Banff, and, passing through Calgary, Regina, Winnipeg, and all the intermediate stations, at most of which speeches and ceremonial enlivened the journey, they hastened on to visit the Maritime Provinces. At Saint John they were received by the Lieutenant-Governor and Premier of New Brunswick. Thence to Monkton, near Bonar Law's old home, where a dramatic and unrehearsed incident occurred. It chanced that the quinquennial Convention of the Acadians was in progress, and there were gathered together



MR. BALDWIN BECOMES CHIEF SITTING EAGLE OF THE TRIBE OF STONEY INDIANS

from all parts of Canada and America the descendants of Acadians who had been turned out of their homes in Canada one hundred and seventy-two years earlier. The occasion was one not to be missed, so Mr Baldwin joined them, addressed them, and received a rousing reception. It was an episode full of romance, and the fact that an English Prime Minister was with them so unexpectedly, on so historic an occasion, atoned perhaps in some measure for the affliction of their ancestors. Immediately after this the party pushed on to Charlottetown, in Prince Edward Island, and from there, on board H M S *Capetown*, to Nova Scotia, where, as Mr Baldwin recalled later at the Canada Club Dinner, 'After the trouble further South in 1775, those who would not separate from the British connection, moved up at the sacrifice of all that they had, into what was then Nova Scotia.'

That little sea trip of approximately fifty miles emphasised the prestige of the British Navy. No one could quite understand why the Commander seemed so eager to get away, or why he made the passage at full speed, so that his distinguished guests were almost shaken off the decks. On nearing Pictou, however, the cause became apparent. The approach was normally too shallow for a large vessel, and the channel too narrow. The tide had just turned — and he was racing the tide. He drove his ship at top speed, he transferred his passengers to a launch, slung it overboard, and as she swung to a single anchor in her own length, leaving a margin, it was said, of less than the width of her beam, he lowered his launch opposite the landing-stage, and steamed off again on the rapidly ebbing tide to wait outside.

This achievement was cheered from the shore even more than the arrival of Mr Baldwin, for inhabitants of the Maritime Provinces understand accurate and daring seamanship as well as they know the inhospitality of their own coastal shores. The Atlantic squadron had never before sent one of H M 's ships right into Pictou.

That same evening they were the guests at Halifax of the Government of Nova Scotia, and the following day the homeward-bound Canadian Pacific S S *Empress of Scotland* picked them up at North Sydney, so that on the 24th of August they were back again in London, having travelled over twelve thousand miles in thirty days.

Ronald immediately paid a flying visit to see his wife, Violet,

in the south of France. For six years her health had been causing him grave concern. Of necessity she lived first in Italy, and later on the warm Mediterranean coast of France. Since the beginning of the War she had become more and more fragile in spite of every form of treatment, only her natural buoyancy supplied the will to live. Now she was rapidly succumbing to pernicious anaemia. Ronald's hurried trips always revived her for a time, and left him proportionately dejected, but it was she who emphatically vetoed his constant inclination to retire from official life. The situation was additionally harassing because his anxiety could scarcely be shared, with very few exceptions, by his contemporaries and colleagues. Violet's condition was now so serious, however, that he clearly saw the inevitability of retiring in the New Year.

Meanwhile his duties at home claimed him relentlessly. Immediately following his return to London, Mr Baldwin had left for Lanarkshire to fulfil engagements in Scotland. He returned hurriedly in view of his pending departure for the annual pilgrimage to Aix-les-Bains, where Mr and Mrs Davidson were awaiting him, and writing to Ronald on the 29th, John Davidson says, 'The P.M. is full of your praises for the way the arrangements were carried out [in Canada], he is looking forward to contemplation after perpetual motion.'

Mr Baldwin had left Ronald in charge of a difficult negotiation, which had been faithfully transacted. When the result was reported to him, he wrote in complimentary terms, ending with 'And now take your holiday, which you can enjoy with as clear a conscience as usually falls to men in our exalted and much tempted sphere.'

But Ronald was not destined to enjoy any holiday, he was repeatedly summoned to the South of France. Returning after a twenty-four-hour visit in January, he found R.D. Blumenfeld in the Blue Train, so instead of turning in, they sat up together the whole night. They talked about Bonar Law, Mr Baldwin and Max Beaverbrook. Blumenfeld had known and admired Mr. Baldwin greatly, but failed to understand his 'fickle friendship' or 'the callous way he casts away an inconvenient colleague'. 'Nowadays,' said Blumenfeld, 'whenever S.B. sees me in the Carlton Club, he cuts me.' And R.D.B. was not only distressed, but genuinely hurt at this reversal of congenial contact.

Ronald repeated the substance of this story to Mr Baldwin, and tried to mend the breach Mr Baldwin, however, found it impossible to countenance 'a man who had sold his soul,' meaning, to Lord Beaverbrook¹ So these erstwhile friends came together no more, for Mr Baldwin's honesty recognises neither boundaries, nor even the tempering of expression While stepping through the french windows from the terrace to the Cabinet room at No 10, for example, one of his Ministers had asked him, Why do you hate —— so? 'Hate him' retorted the Prime Minister 'When I see a heap of dung in the road, I don't hate it, I merely avoid putting my heel on it' and within a week that reply was quoted across a London dinner-table, accompanied by the surprisingly charitable comment of the said ——'

Ronald was becoming increasingly worried by his own private affairs At the beginning of 1928 it was borne in upon him with abundant clearness that forces beyond his personal control were combining to bring about yet another change in his career

On February 2nd therefore his resignation was gazetted, and as soon as he was free he returned to the South of France

Violet was only lingering from day to day and drifting rapidly, until one morning he lifted her frail body while they smoothed her pillows for the last time And so in his arms she found release at last

¹ Garvin once described Mr Baldwin's disruptive attitude to' Lord Beaverbrook as 'against every dictate of common sense '

CHAPTER 34

1928

THE ONLY PERSON WHO KNEW OF RONALD'S PROSPECTIVE remarriage was Violet herself. She had consigned him to me with everything she valued most. There was, however, another purpose in temporarily suppressing publicity of these domestic arrangements.

For some reason women are dismissed from the Civil Service on marriage, and, although I was not a Civil Servant, my position as Private Secretary to Mrs Baldwin at No 10 demanded a delicate evasion of privileges denied to others. It was nearing my sixth year with Mrs Baldwin, and the General Election was pending. The following May, in fact, the Prime Minister appealed to the country with the Election slogans 'Safety First' and 'Trust Me'. But the Electorate decided otherwise — and when the distance of time and a detached view have brought the picture into proper perspective, when the high lights are mellowed and the detail and the shadows understood, then perhaps historians may elucidate both the verdict of the people in May 1929, and the reticence of Bonar Law six years earlier in May 1923.

It was going to be a grievous blow to Mrs Baldwin, and I was particularly anxious to stand by her until the end of the existing administration.

In spite of every precaution, however, and to my very great personal regret, the cat leapt suddenly and inconveniently from its bag on the 30th of October, three months after that secret wedding at the Savoy Chapel.

During lunch we were visited by a genial Press Reporter who had apparently discovered a clue, and once a Press Reporter hits the trail, neither bribery nor tears can divert him.

That same evening I was sitting on a westward-bound bus working its intricate way by spasmodic jerks up the hill to Piccadilly. Sharing my upper-deck seat was a mediocre little man gazing moodily at an illustration in the *Evening Standard*. A large and flattering portrait of myself. More surprising still

were the bold-type headlines, 'Romance at No 10 Downing Street' 'A wedding secret kept for three months' etc

A small inset photograph of the bridegroom, taken for passport purposes some ten years previously, bore little resemblance to the distinguished middle-aged man I had so recently married, but the *Evening Standard* insisted that this 'lean young Cavalry Officer' was my husband, and front-page news is generally accepted as accurate

There was evidently a certain piquancy in this sudden announcement, for Bobby Monsell came into my room at No 10 the following morning, fell into a sofa, and laughed and laughed and laughed. He also gave me a little mechanical bird. With commendable restraint, however, I resisted the impulse to give him a reasoned dissertation extolling the merits of my husband. His versatility, his brown eyes, like liquid manure,' as an old flame described them (*his*, old flame, not mine), his gentleness, ruthlessness, the cut and thrust of his wit, his courage in a tight corner, either physical or metaphysical. And, in fact, I spared him the assurance that Queen Victoria's Albert must have been a mere dumb-bell by comparison.

But when I told Mrs Baldwin the story, she clasped me to her motherly bosom, and cried in genuine dismay

'Oh, my dear! Are you going to be happy? He is such a difficult man!'

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